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TORONTO

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

BY

DOROTHY MARGARET STUART

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PREFACE

IT is a happy chance that Christina Rossetti should be admitted to the English Men of Letters Series in the centenary year of her birth. During the thirty-six years that have passed since her death her fame has been quietly and steadily growing, and few will now be found to question her claim to a niche in that illustrious company.

In all the most important books dealing with the Pre-Raphaelites there may be discerned the figure of "this Jael", as Swinburne called her, "who led their host to victory". But the longest and most comprehensive biography of Christina Rossetti that has yet (1930) appeared, Mr. Mackenzie Bell's *Life*, was written too soon after her death for her portrait to be set in its right perspective. Many points of extreme interest had to be either slurred over or omitted altogether, and no critical estimate was possible at so close a range. Miss Proctor's little study is a mere outline in miniature, and neither Madame Félix-Faure Goyau in *Vers la Joie* nor Mrs. Elizabeth Luther Cary in *The Rossettis* concentrates undivided attention upon Christina. For information concerning her childhood and youth, her middle life, her last years and her last days, we must go to her brother, William Michael Rossetti, by whom we shall certainly not be sent empty away.

In the prefaces to *New Poems* and *Collected Poems*, in *Family Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, *Family Letters of Christina Rossetti*, and *Some Reminiscences*, he has garnered a rich store of facts, memories, and conjectures. No biographer of his sister need apologise for quoting from him freely, frequently, and verbatim.

My most grateful thanks are due to Sir Wyndham Dunstan, F.R.S., for putting at my disposal letters of Christina Rossetti never before printed and rare first editions of her less accessible works; to Dr. Paget Toynbee for reading my own verse-rendering of *Dolce Cor Mio* in MS. and suggesting two emendations, both of which I have adopted; and to Sir Owen Seaman for permitting me to quote from his unpublished lecture on "The House of Life".

D. M. S.

July 1930.

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CHAPTER I

ANCESTRY—ENVIRONMENT—JUVENILIA

WHEN, in the summer of the year 1820, Ferdinand I. of Naples reluctantly decided to grant a constitution to his kingdom, Shelley wrote the *Ode to Naples* in which he exhorted this "youngest giant birth" to wave its "lightning lance in mirth", and the Curator of the Department of Ancient Bronzes and Marbles in the Neapolitan Museum, bursting into song, exclaimed:

> Sei pur bella cogli astre sul crine
> Che scintillan quai vivi zaffiri,
> È pur dolce quel fiato che spiri
> Porporina foriera del dì!

There was some excuse both for the Curator's enthusiasm and for the form it took. Gabriele Pasquale Giuseppe Rossetti was an ardent member of the Society of the Carbonari, and before obtaining a post in the Museum had been for a time official librettist to the opera house of San Carlo. His political views were almost aggressively liberal, and yet his personal sympathies must have been curiously divided between the Bonapartes and the Bourbons. His father, Nicola Rossetti, a blacksmith of Vasto, is said to have died of humiliation after being thrashed by

French soldiers during Napoleon's Italian campaign of 1799; his own earliest patron, the Marchese del Vasto, to whom he owed such schooling as he received, was Ferdinand's major-domo and had fled with that monarch when Napoleon, descending again upon Naples in 1806, planted his brother Joseph on the hastily vacated throne. On the other hand, neither Joseph Bonaparte nor his successor, Joachim Murat, showed any desire to deprive the Curator of his post, and he was on excellent terms with them both. Twenty-four years later Joseph's niece, Lucien's daughter, Lady Dudley Stuart, stood sponsor to Rossetti's youngest child, to whom she gave her own baptismal name of Christina.

The blacksmith of Vasto had four sons, three of whom were more than commonly gifted. Andrea entered the priesthood and became a Canon in the Church of San Giuseppe at Vasto; Domenicho, equally skilful in languages, theology, and medicine, made the first recorded descent into the grotto of Montecalvo, near Nice, and proceeded to compose a poem in three cantos when he came up again. Antonio, though he adopted the comparatively unintellectual calling of a wigmaker, composed "some uncultured verses, not destitute of native humour and faculty". These verses might have been published in 1884 but for the anxious disapproval expressed by the surviving children of his brother Gabriele. The bent of the family seems to have been towards orthodoxy; even in Gabriele, who early turned to anti-clericalism, there was that queer streak of mysticism not infrequently observed in free-thinkers. It was this streak which urged him to his lifelong quest of esoteric inner meanings in the works of Dante.

The *porporina foriera del dì* proved to be a false dawn after all. The constitution given with one hand was taken away with the other, and on March 23, 1821, Ferdinand returned from the Congress of Laibach at the head of an Austrian army. The Carbonari were aghast at this sudden turn of the wheel. Some fled. Others, of whom Gabriele Rossetti was one, bolted into hiding. The political and poetical activities of the ex-Curator of Ancient Marbles and Bronzes had drawn down upon his head the fierce wrath of the reinstated Bourbon dynasty, and for three months he obliterated himself, to be rescued at last by Lady Moore, the wife of Sir Graham Moore, then commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean. This lady persuaded the Admiral to smuggle Rossetti to Malta. Disguised in a British naval uniform, the fugitive bade farewell to the peacock-tinted bay where seven months earlier the *Maria Crowther* had lain at anchor with Keats and Severn on board.

In Malta, where he spent two and a half years, Rossetti maintained himself by giving lessons in Latin and Italian, and there it was his great good fortune to attract the notice and win the friendship of John Hookham Frere. One would not have expected the author of *The Loves of the Triangles* to be particularly interested in mystical interpretations of Dante; but there were other points of contact between the minds of the two men. At Frere's suggestion, and armed with letters of introduction from him, Rossetti migrated to London. He was sanguine, he was self-confident, he had, as one of his new acquaintances observed, a sort of "Parson Adams-like simplicity" about him. Until his English patron's death in 1846 there was a

regular exchange of letters between them, a correspondence enlivened on Frere's side by occasional drafts for fifty or a hundred pounds, and on Rossetti's by copious esoteric and philological notes. In April 1826, two years after his arrival in London, the exile was sufficiently prosperous to marry Frances Lavinia Mary Polidori, and to set up housekeeping with her on a modest scale at 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place.

In that same year were published *Poems by Two Brothers* and Rogers's *Italy*, and Mr. Thomas Babington Macaulay was called to the bar.

The name Polidori is obviously of Greek origin, but the family to which Mrs. Rossetti belonged had lived for many generations in Tuscany. Her grandfather, Agostino Ansaldo Polidori, practised as a doctor at Brentina, near Pisa, and amused himself by composing verse upon such diverse subjects as the story of Tobias and the science of Osteology; her great-uncle, Francesco, also prone to drop into poetry, printed privately a poem "more or less in the vein of Ariosto". Her father, Agostino's son, Gaetano, having abandoned the study of law at the University of Pisa, became secretary to Alfieri and incidentally made the acquaintance of the Pretender's absentee wife, the Countess of Albany. He was with the poet in Paris during "the events of July" 1789, and saw him "leap with joy" across the ruins of the demolished Bastille. After which, armed with introductions to General Paoli and Mrs. Cosway, Gaetano betook himself to England.

Italian was at that time second only to French as a subject of study for English misses. The earlier Georges had not made German fashionable, the later Georges cared little for their ancestral tongue, and it

was reserved for the Prince Consort to popularise the pursuit of Goethe at the expense of Dante. When Polidori settled in London he found no dearth of pupils there. By 1793 he was sufficiently prosperous to take unto himself an English bride, Anna Maria Pearce, herself a governess, whose father, a writing-master of stout Tory sentiments, always found it hard to understand why first his daughter Anna and later his granddaughter Frances should have chosen Italian husbands. Polidori continued to prosper, and the number of his children continued to grow. It was for their benefit that he bought the small house at Holmer Green, near Great Missenden, to which he himself retired in 1836, and where he occupied his well-earned leisure by writing grammars, translating Milton and Lucan into Italian, making marquetry tables, and—when opportunity offered—taking pot-shots at wood-pigeons through the window. After a sojourn of three years the Polidoris gave up this rural villa and moved to a house in Park Village East, within a morning walk of Charlotte Street, where their married daughter lived with her Italian husband and her four small children.

Of the four Polidori daughters three, Margaret, Frances, and Charlotte, had adopted what was then almost the only calling open to gently nurtured, dowerless girls, and had become governesses. The youngest, Eliza, seems to have been the Martha, and after Mrs. Polidori became an invalid she took the management of the household into her own capable hands. Margaret, mildly eccentric, returned betimes to the paternal roof; Charlotte, after teaching the little Thynnes, remained at Longleat till 1885 as companion to their mother, the Marchioness of Bath. Remains Frances.

It was not only in the novels of the period that well-favoured governesses were wooed by the masculine relatives of their pupils. Mrs. Polidori's sister, Harriet Pearce, was said to have been secretly married to the Earl of Yarborough; Miss Frances Polidori was quite openly and quite honourably admired by a certain Colonel Macgregor, brother of the Sir Patrick Macgregor whose young family were in her care. She was certainly charming and almost certainly beautiful. In the famous crayon portrait by her son, Dante Gabriel, traces of beauty are still visible, but when youth gave an added grace to regularity of feature, when the austerely folded grey hair fell in nut-brown curls, Frances Lavinia Mary must have won more hearts than the gallant Colonel's. She elected to exchange her own for that of a Neapolitan refugee, and two converging lines of most colourful ancestors met in their four children, Maria Francesca, born in 1827, Dante Gabriel in 1828, William Michael in 1829, and Christina Georgina in 1830.

As has been seen, these children had three aunts. But for what a coroner's jury described as a visitation of God they might have had three uncles. Of the two who survived, one, Philip Robert, was slightly "odd", and the other, Henry Francis, became a solicitor's clerk and changed his patronymic to Polydore. The evanished uncle was that queer being, Dr. John Polidori, who was engaged as Byron's travelling physician but between whom and the noble poet a rupture soon took place. "A very extravagant, silly gentleman", Byron called him. Dr. John was, in a sense, more Byronic than his master, and it may not have been entirely his fault that his own lurid romance, *The*

Vampyre, was fathered upon the author of *The Giaour*. Becoming involved at a later date in gambling debts which he could not meet, he put an end to his life. Though the Rossetti children were never allowed to mention him, his portrait hung in the room in which his niece Christina died.

The ancestry of those children has seemed sufficiently important to deserve consideration in some detail, not only because it is in itself interesting, but because it played a large part in determining the character and genius of the two, Dante Gabriel and Christina, who have made the name of Rossetti perdurable. A more picturesque family tree it would be difficult to conceive. If it were adorned with appropriate emblems it would look like some highly ornate Christmas conifer, for there would hang from its branches white cockades and Phrygian caps, golden lilies and golden bees. Upon Christina the Polidori influence was especially strong, and it is impossible to resist the conclusion that it was the early and constant contact of her mother and aunts with a world never entered by her father and brothers which invested her with that indefinable and indelible air of old-fashioned good-breeding remembered by all who knew her. There can hardly have been any other reason for the curious difference in fibre between her and Dante Gabriel.

The name of Charlotte Street has now been changed to Hallam Street, and the house where the Rossetti children were born has been swept away. In its place stands a block of modern flats bearing an emphatic blue disc to remind the passer-by that here Dante Gabriel first saw the tempered sunlight of an English

May. The L.C.C., in its wisdom, has not thought fit to mention his sister Christina. She was born there on December 5, 1830, and five years later the family moved into a slightly larger house, now obliterated, in the same street. The street, as described by William Michael Rossetti, is in certain respects greatly altered for the better, though some of the remaining houses have still that shabby, raffish look which once pervaded the whole scene. Gone is the barber's shop where prints of an indecorous nature were exposed for sale; a smug plate-glass hostelry has replaced the tavern at the corner where the rattling, musty-smelling hackney-coaches used to halt. The cobblestones trodden by the top-hatted policemen of Sir Robert Peel's recently instituted force have been transformed into wood-blocks and tar. Yet from what survives it is not difficult to reconstruct the background against which Christina Rossetti's first impressions stood out in relief.

Mrs. Rossetti was a contented and unquestioning Anglican, and her tolerant husband had agreed that their children should be brought up in their mother's creed. All four babies were accordingly baptized in the ugly little church of All Souls, Langham Place. The sponsors of the youngest were Lady Dudley Stuart, *née* Bonaparte, and Miss Georgina Macgregor, one of Mrs. Rossetti's former pupils. New churches were then springing up all round Regent's Park. All Souls was itself new, and newer still was Holy Trinity, Albany Street. Christ Church in the same bald street was in process of construction.

Except for the bounded contiguity of shade in the Park and the pillared symmetry of some of the adjacent

terraces there was little in Christina's early environment to stimulate her sense of beauty. Both the Charlotte Street houses must have been stuffy, dingy, and bare. Until she was seven years old not a single picture adorned her home. At that time a painter from Vasto, Smargiassi by name, spent a few days with his fellow-townsman, Gabriele Rossetti, and presented his hostess with two oil-paintings of his own perpetration, a view of Vasto itself, and a prospect of the Blue Grotto at Capri. To these was shortly after added a print of Queen Victoria in her box at the opera, the gift of Aunt Harriet, the reputed Countess of Yarborough. In neither of the Charlotte Street houses was any room set apart as a nursery, nor within their memory had the little boys and girls any other nurse than their mother. During her temporary absence owing to ill-health in 1836 the disconcerted Gabriele was left in charge of their young family, and his lamentations in his letters to Frere were truly pathetic. Normally all the Rossettis, old and young, led a congested but not inharmonious life in the "front parlour or dining-room", the drawing-room upstairs being used only when the father wished to receive a pupil, or to study in unwonted tranquillity. When the children were babies they crawled or toddled round him while he refreshed himself after a hard day's work with his students at King's College by pursuing the cryptogram of the *Divina Commedia*. When they were older they would watch and listen while expatriated Italian visitors talked politics at the top of their voices. They must have been a picturesque if somewhat perturbing company, these dark-skinned exiles. Among them at various times were Pasta, the *prima donna*; Moscati, he to

whom Thackeray dedicated *Pendennis*; the brothers Filippo and Benedetto Pistrucci; Sangiovanni, clay-modeller and ex-brigand; Parodi, the dancing-master; Dragoni, first violoncellist at the Italian Opera. Most interesting of all, though the younger children could not remember his sinister, emaciated figure, was Paganini. Many of Gabriele's visitors were old Carbonari, and most of them were Freemasons. Their pet aversions were *Luigi Filippo* and *gli Austriaci*, against whom they would inveigh histrionically, while Mrs. Rossetti regaled them with bread-and-butter and tea.

English callers at Charlotte Street were few, but there was at least one outstanding personality among them, Cipriani Potter, principal of the Royal Academy of Music. He collaborated with Gabriele Rossetti in an opera founded on Byron's *Corsair* and called *Medora e Corrado*. Mrs. Cipriani Potter came sometimes, and then Christina, accustomed to seeing her mother and aunts austerely clad in the coal-scuttle bonnets and narrow skirts of Queen Adelaide's favouring, must have had a fleeting glimpse of Early Victorian elegance, of pendent plumes and lavender flounces and delicate French kid gloves. On one occasion, when this lady called on Mrs. Rossetti, Christina, being present, remarked of the family tabby that it "looked very sedate". More than fifty years later William Michael remembered "the glance of amused surprise with which Mrs. Potter greeted the use, by such infantine lips, of such a 'dictionary-word', so appositely introduced".

Less fortunate than his brother Benedetto, who attained some success as a modeller and designed the St. George on the British gold coins, Filippo Pistrucci was glad to accept a commission to paint water-colour

portraits of the Rossetti children. Christina at the age of seven he depicted as a demure, inscrutable child with hair cropped short and parted in the centre of the high and full forehead. She had already the searching and unfathomable hazel eyes later to be her chief beauty, and the set droop of the mouth that was not unpleasing either in childhood or early maturity, but which had become a curve of relentless self-repression when Dante Gabriel drew the celebrated crayon portrait of her in 1877. William Michael tells us that she was "a spirited and also a lazy small girl", and that old Mr. Polidori, after contemplating the vivacious Maria Francesca, the lively Dante Gabriel, and the well-behaved narrator himself, observed of his second grand-daughter that she had *più spirito di tutti.*

She was a physically fragile child, whose fantastic streak of humour was probably stimulated by the quaint stories which Mrs. Rossetti evolved for the delight of her family. Unlike Maria Francesca she was never "bookish" in her tastes, nor was she particularly tractable. Her slightly difficult temper was balanced, however, by a conscientious anxiety to correct it, and by a great warmth of affection for her relatives, especially for her mother, to whom in 1842 she addressed her earliest verses. Earlier, before she was able to write, she had dictated a tale called *The Dervise*, obviously suggested by *The Arabian Nights*, and earlier still she had given utterance to this intriguing fragment:

> Cecilia never went to school
> Without her gladiator.

William Michael traces the gladiator to a book entitled *The Looking Glass for the Mind*, to which the

youthful Rossettis were much addicted, but cannot explain the association of ideas. It seems not impossible that Christina may have heard either her father or her grandfather descanting upon the antique custom of sending a *paedagogus* to escort children to school, and that some confused image of a gladiator as a person likely to prove a stout defender may have inspired her to allot one to Cecilia.

While the Polidoris still lived at Holmer Green Christina enjoyed what she herself described as "the delightful idle liberty to prowl all alone" about the cottage grounds, which seemed to her infant eyes "vast, varied, worth exploring". It was there that she found and decently interred a dead mouse only to exhume it a few days afterwards and to flee in horror from the black insect which crept forth, as she related many years later in *Time Flies*. Her imagination was attracted by birds and beasts, particularly if they were beautiful or uncouth, and no child ever had a more charming vision than her dream of the London canaries, recorded by William Sharp. She thought she was in Regent's Park at dawn, and that she saw "a wave of yellow light sweep from the trees". It was all the captive canaries of London who had assembled there and were now winging back to their cages again.

Though the migration of the Polidoris from Holmer Green to Park Village East cut off their grandchildren from the joys of the country, there were certain compensations. The little house with the snail-haunted, shady garden sloping down to the Regent's Canal formed the goal of many of Mrs. Rossetti's morning walks, and she seems always to have had one or more of her children with her. The nearest way lay along

the dreary waste of Albany Street, but there were broken glimpses of green lawns and great houses, and mamma would carefully point out the difference between the Ionic and the Corinthian column when they passed a terrace or a crescent with a colonnade. The two boys were by this time pupils at Mr. Paul's school in Foley Place; the education of the two girls was—and remained—their mother's sole charge. A steady decline in Rossetti's health and in the family fortunes from 1843–44 onward made it desirable that Maria Francesca and Christina should be well equipped for the inevitable calling of governess. All the children, however, seem to have contrived to haunt Park Village East, where not the least of the attractions was the miniature printing press in the garden shed. With the assistance of a Sicilian compositor called Privitera, Polidori printed various little books and pamphlets, including *Sir Hugh the Heron*, Dante Gabriel's *Legendary Tale in Four Parts*. This was in 1843. Four years later the same press was employed to print a slender volume of verses by the youthful poet's even more youthful sister, Christina.

The period covered by these poems, 1842-47, was one of sorrow and uncertainty for the Rossettis. Of the four children only two were as yet self-supporting. Maria Francesca left home in 1844, to become a governess in the family of Lord Charles Thynne, and in 1845 William Michael obtained, through the influence of Mr. Cipriani Potter, a clerkship in the Inland Revenue office. Dante Gabriel was a student at Sass's Academy, and Christina was at home, ailing without being exactly ill. External circumstances may thus be partly responsible for the melancholy cast of the

forty-two lyrics in the privately printed 1847 volume, but the immature mind is often tinged with allicholy and musing, and few themes are more congenial to poetesses of tender years than premature dissolution and unrequited love.

After Christina Rossetti's death seventeen little notebooks were found among her papers, containing her poetical compositions between April 1842 and June 1866, the earlier being in Maria Francesca's handwriting, the later in her own. William Michael, her literary executor, included many of these Juvenilia in his 1896 edition of *New Poems*, but he omitted one or two in the Polidori book and inserted others, such as "The Chinaman" and "The Novice", not to be found there. The Polidori book itself has become a pearl of great price to collectors, and the copy in the British Museum is among those rare specimens kept quietly inurned and released only with precaution. This copy consists of sixty-six pages, eighteen being left blank, and a loose leaf with the lines to Mrs. Rossetti printed on it is pasted in at the end, with a note initialled R. G. (*i.e.* Richard Garnett) indicating that they were Christina's first attempt at verse. Very engagingly, in a preliminary "Word to the Reader", Mr. Polidori excuses himself for "desiring to retain these early spontaneous efforts in a permanent form, and for silencing the objections urged by her modest diffidence", and he places in the forefront six appropriate lines from Metastasio, who was at that period Christina's favourite among the Italians, the mystic theories of Rossetti *père* having unfortunately given his younger children a temporary distaste for Dante.

Many of the poems thus preserved by grand-

paternal piety might have been written by almost any intelligent little girl with a knack of rhyme; for example, the birthday lines to her mother:

To-day's your natal day;
Sweet flowers I bring;
Mother, accept I pray
My offering.
And may you happy live
And long us bless;
Receiving as you give
Great happiness.

This first poem is unremarkable; but there are other things in the Polidori book which bear already the indelible stamp of the author's personality. Her peculiar cadence, supple and deep-toned, the strange charm of anaphora, which, consciously or unconsciously, she wielded with such effect, the passionate orthodoxy, the contempt for "vanities", the anxiety so to pass through things temporal that finally she lose not the things eternal, all are there already, all are well defined. It is a little curious to find a child of fourteen writing, as she does in "Earth and Heaven", of the delights of the visible world:

Jewels that lie sparkling
Beneath the waters darkling,
Seaweed, coral, amber,
Flowers that climb and clamber,

then asking the question whether "in our promised heaven" there will be "greater charms than these", and finally answering:

Yes, for aye in heaven doth dwell
Glory indestructible,
What here below finds tainted birth
In the corrupted sons of earth,

but that child is the essential and immutable Christina. Even her affection for seaweed and coral endured to the end of her life.

Setting aside the undistinguished and the ephemeral, these Juvenilia fall into three groups, devotional, contemplative, and dramatic-lyrical. It is in the first group that the "C. G. R." of later years is most readily recognisable, but, as Sir Edmund Gosse has pointed out, certain stanzas in "The Dead City", with their glowing and incongruously assembled fruits, give a foretaste of "Goblin Market":

> And the apricot and pear
> And the pulpy fig were there,
> Cherries and dark mulberries,
> Bunchy currants, strawberries,
> And the lemon wan and fair.

"The Dead City" is a long poem, perhaps suggested by one of the *Arabian Nights*, with a somewhat obscure allegorical *motif*, but it has hints of "House to Home" and "The Prince's Progress" as well as of "Goblin Market":

> Soon the birds no more were seen
> Glancing through the living green,
> And a blight had passed upon
> All the trees, and the pale sun
> Shone with a strange lurid sheen.

In the heart of the dead city the dreamer finds a pavilion with a banquet spread, and a company of revellers turned into stone. She draws no inferences; she points no morals; but her conclusion is characteristic:

> All these things that I have said
> Awed me and made me afraid;
> What was I that I should see
> So much hidden mystery?
> And I straightway knelt and prayed.

Of literary influences there is small trace, though Christina herself inserts pointers with the names of Maturin and Crabbe. She is consciously affected by the author of *Melmoth the Wanderer*. In "The Song of the Star" she seems unconsciously to have caught flecks of colour and wafts of music from Shelley's "Cloud":

> My face is light and my beam is life
> And my passionless being hath no strife,
> Beyond all clouds and all mistiness
> I float in the strength of my loveliness,
> And I move round the sun in a measured motion
> In the blue expanse of the skyey ocean.

It may well have been the lurid and hectic influence of Maturin which impressed upon the plastic mind of Christina strange images of passion and despair; it was certainly the untimely death of her Aunt Charlotte's pupil, Lady Isabella Howard, which inspired the sonnet "Lady Isabella, thou are gone away" and other early threnodies; it is not impossible that developmental anæmia and the imperfectly oxygenated atmosphere of Charlotte Street played some part in determining the tragic colour of many of the dramatic-lyrical pieces; but it is at least curious to find what may be called the broken betrothal *motif* emerging so soon. Its constant resurgence in her later work may not unreasonably be ascribed to the Collinson and Cayley episodes; yet here it is, insistent and articulate, before she had even seen James Collinson, much less become engaged to him and broken off the engagement. Eight of the English poems in the Polidori book deal with the subject of love frustrated either by perfidy or by death. Of these eight one ("Fair Margaret") was written in 1844; four ("The Dead Bride", "The

Dying Man to his Betrothed", "Sappho", and "The Ruined Cross") in 1846; and three ("The Dream", "Zara", and "Eva") in 1847. Both the Italian poems, "Amore e Dovere" and "Amore e Dispetto", strike a similar note. In "Fair Margaret" the *motif* is positively clamant:

> The faith of years is broken,
> The fate of years is spoken,
> Years past and years to come;
> I pity and I scorn thee,
> I would not now adorn me
> For thy false bridal home!

In "The Dead Bride" we see an elder sister of her in "The Prince's Progress" who

> comes through the door,
> The face covered, the feet before,

while in "The Dying Man to his Betrothed" it is the bridegroom who expires. William Michael did not include "Fair Margaret" in either of his posthumous editions of his sister's poetry; "Sappho", "Eva", and "The Ruined Cross" were also omitted. The first of these three, though a small and slight thing enough, contains some phrases of the authentic, inalienable Christina quality. Such are:

> Oh, it were better far to die
> And in death's dreamless sleep to be
> Unconscious that none weep for me,
> Eased from my weight of heaviness,
> Forgetful of forgetfulness.

"Eva", an extraordinarily passionate and mature heart-cry, was avowedly inspired by Maturin; yet, even so, one remains bewildered at the equanimity of the parents and grandparents who calmly contemplated these vicarious agonies on the part of a girl of sixteen—

and that at a period when we have always been given to understand that nothing but the weakest of milk-and-water escaped condemnation as *pas pour les jeunes filles*.

> Yes, I loved him all too well,
> And my punishment is just;
> But its greatness who can tell?
>
> . . . .
>
> Let the loved heel gall and press
> On my neck; so it should be.
> 'Twas in madness that I spake it,
> Let him leave my heart or take it,
> Let him heal my heart or break it.

Of course, it does not ring true. It has none of the pang and thrill of "What would I give?" or "I wish I could remember that first day"; but neither is it the sort of verse one would expect from a pious and petticoated young subject of Queen Victoria in the tenth year of Her Majesty's reign. Nor can one help feeling that, had Christina fulfilled the destiny marked out for her and become a governess, she would have borne about with her an even more dangerous volcano than that which smouldered in the meagre form of Charlotte Brontë.

The idea of a heart being broken in order that it might be healed recurs in the very curious poem called "Divine and Human Pleading", wherein "a trembling contrite man" invokes Mary Magdalen and is sharply snubbed by her. Gosse considered this "the best and most characteristic" of all Christina's "girlish verses". Even if he was thinking of the Polidori book only the verdict seems a strange one. And it seems stranger still if we realise that the posthumous poem beginning "The stream moaneth as it floweth" was written in the same year—1847.

The stream moaneth as it floweth,
The wind sigheth as it bloweth,
Leaves are falling, Autumn goeth,
  Winter cometh back again.

. . . . . .

Who will help me? Who will love me?
Heaven sets forth no light above me,
Long forgotten feelings move me,
    I am full of heaviness.
Earth is cold, too cold the sea;
Whither shall I turn and flee?
Is there any hope for me?
  Any ease for my heart-aching,
  Any sleep that hath no waking,
  Any night without day-breaking,
    Any rest from weariness?

This is surely the Christina of "Touching 'Never' ", of "Twilight Night", of "Sleeping at Last". It is not often that a note so characteristic, struck so early, continues to vibrate until the last murmur of the long-drawn-out music has died away.

CHAPTER II

THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

THE first of Christina Rossetti's poems to attain the dignity of print was "Heart's Chill Between", called originally "The Last Hope". This was written in the autumn of 1847—"a season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" for her Muse—and appeared in the *Athenæum* of October 14, 1848. Other poems of the same autumn harvest were "Death's Chill Between", "Night and Death", "The Lotus Eaters"—quite unconnected with Tennyson—"The Stream Moaneth" and "The World's Harmonies". In this group the most significant is probably "Night and Death", exalting the second concept above the first. There—as so often elsewhere in her meditative poetry—we see the resurgence of the idea that the world and all they that dwell therein are essentially evil. It was not at that time an unfamiliar idea, and it formed an integral part of the otherwise tranquil Anglican theology of Mrs. Rossetti and her younger daughter. The elder, Maria Francesca, the "dear Saint" of Christina's veneration, however perfervid, however prone to heart-searchings and scrupulosity she might be, escaped that gloomy tinct, and was never in danger, as her sister was, of fearing that she "might miss the goal at last, might miss the crown". In "The World's Harmonies" there are colours and

phrases that have affinity with some of the gorgeous embroiderings upon the Song of the Three Children which Miss Rossetti later loved to execute, but most of the verse of this period suggests that she felt her span of life upon earth might not be much further prolonged, and that she was setting her face quietly towards heaven. By the time that death was really imminent her poetic stature had been augmented by many cubits, and she had written "Heaven Overarches", and "Sleeping at Last".

To the closing month of 1847 belong "Repining", "I do set my Bow in a Cloud", and "The Whole Head is Sick and the Whole Heart Faint". The longest, "Repining", was printed later in *The Germ* but not chosen by Christina herself for inclusion in any of the collected editions of her work published during her lifetime. It is a curiously unequal performance, with an underlying allegory not very easy to interpret. To a sort of Mariana lady, living in solitude, there comes a stranger whose "cheek was white but hardly pale", and at his bidding she rises and goes forth on an unearthly journey, through landscapes reminiscent of "The Dead City". Together they behold avalanches, shipwrecks, conflagrations, and battlefields, till the appalled pilgrim not unnaturally desires to return to solitude—and tranquillity. The dreadful seriousness of the poem makes it a difficult one to criticise seriously. There is little of Christina's finer handiwork even in the best patches, even in such lines as

> But these were dead; they felt no more
> The anguish of the wounds they bore;
> Behold, they shall not sigh again,
> Nor justly fear, nor hope in vain.

Neither of the shorter poems of this December group was published while the poet lived. At the head of either she might have set as a motto Goethe's

> Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
> Weiss was ich leide.

Both are informed with immaturity's vague and nameless despair. In the second, a sonnet, there is a more architectural quality than we find in most of her early work, more of the thrust and counter-thrust of antithesis, a figure she soon learned to employ with admirable effect:

> Woe for the young who say that life is long,
> Who turn from the sunrising to the west,
> Who feel no pleasure and can find no rest,
> And in the morning sigh for evensong.

If William Bell Scott's first visit to Charlotte Street actually took place—as he himself suggests that it did—in December 1847, this may have been the very manuscript upon the desk at which he discovered Christina writing; but it is not easy to fix the date of that visit, which would be memorable for its early and vivid impression of her if for no other reason. William Michael thinks that Scott's memory held true as far as the date was concerned, but played him false in some other matters. It was not until March, 1848, that Dante Gabriel, weary of his occupations at the Royal Academy Schools, began to study colour under Ford Madox Brown and not until July or August that he began to share a studio with Holman Hunt. We may suppose that it was either at the end of 1847 or early in 1848 that a gaunt Scotsman with heavy dark hair and incongruously light blue eyes called at Charlotte

Street to see the young man with the Italian name, from whom he had received an enthusiastic letter concerning certain poems of his, "Rosabel"—for whom that same young man was later to provide a kinswoman called "Jenny"—and "A Dream of Love". Ten years earlier Scott had paid his first visit to London, well armed with etchings, manuscripts, and what his compatriots would call "a guid conceit o' himsel' ". After an interval spent chiefly in the Government school of design at Newcastle, his feet were set once more within the gates of Babylon, and he determined to look up his appreciative correspondent, who, it appeared, was himself a budding poet. At least, he had sent Scott two quite promising essays—"The Blessed Damozel" and "My Sister's Sleep".

Gabriel the younger was not at home when Mr. Scott called, but he was immediately ushered into the presence of Gabriel the elder, whom he found "in the small front parlour or dining room",

> sitting by the fire in a great chair . . . with a thick manuscript book open before him, and the largest snuff-box I ever saw beside him, conveniently open. He had a black cap on his head furnished with a great peak or shade for the eyes, so that I saw his face only partially. By the window was a high, narrow reading desk at which stood writing a slight girl with a serious regular profile, dark against the pallid wintry light without. This most interesting to me of the two inmates turned at my entrance, made the most formal and graceful curtsy, and then resumed her writing, and the old gentleman signed to a chair for my sitting down, and explained that his son was now painting in a studio which he and a young friend had taken together; this young friend's name was Holman Hunt.

The winter of 1847–48 was a grey and bitter one for the Rossettis. Gone were the happy days when drafts

for a hundred pounds would arrive from Mr. Hookham Frere, and when Mr. Charles Hudson Lyell of Kinnordy, Forfar, would disburse large sums to promote such recondite works as the *Spirito Anti-Papale che produsse la Riforma*. Frere was now dead, and Lyell's zeal had cooled. Mrs. Rossetti and Maria Francesca were both going out teaching, William Michael was plodding away at the Inland Revenue office at a salary of between eighty and ninety pounds a year, Dante Gabriel was studying art, and Christina—it is a little difficult to say what Christina was doing, besides writing pensive poems and attending divine service at Christ Church, Albany Street, with admirable regularity. The health of old Mr. Rossetti continued to decline and his eyesight failed fast, but he was still able to receive a few private pupils among whom was then numbered a certain shy young man born with the gift of tongues, one who could turn lightly from Arabic to Urdu, and from Hebrew to Iroquois, and whose translation of Dante into *terza rima* probably owed much to Rossetti's teaching if little to his theories. The name of this scholar was Charles Bagot Cayley. There seems to be some doubt as to whether it was at this period or a few years later that Christina's friendship with him began, though she herself has placed it on record that at the time of her father's death Cayley had "much endeared himself" to them all. It was certainly not until 1860 that they saw a great deal of each other, and in the interval the devastating Collinson had crossed her path, with effects out of all proportion to his personal merit. One may hazard a guess that it was of the earlier rather than of the later encounter that she wrote in *Monna Innominata*:

I wish I could remember that first day,
  First hour, first moment, of your meeting me,
  If bright or dim the season, it might be
Summer or Winter for aught that I can say;
So unrecorded did it slip away,
  So blind was I to see and to foresee,
  So dull to mark the budding of my tree
That would not blossom yet for many a May.

The year 1848 was a memorable one in the life of Christina Rossetti. How rapidly her style was maturing and her poetical being defining itself becomes apparent if we consider "A Pause of Thought", the first of the three poems now grouped together as "Three Stages", which were written in 1848, 1849, and 1854, and of which the second and third did not see the light until after her death. If this first poem, written in February 1848, be compared with, let us say, "Wishes" and "Eleanora", two of the summer songs of the previous year, it will at once become manifest that there is now a new impetus, a new momentum, sweeping irresistibly onward to the greater poems of 1849—"One Certainty", "Remember Me", "An End", "Looking Forward", "After Death". This poem was called originally "Lines in Memory of Schiller's *Der Pilgrim*", and it is not unamusing to compare it with the utterances of that rather dull dog who, after trudging perseveringly over rivers and mountains, reaches the trite and self-evident conclusion that

das Dort is niemals hier.

The Pilgrim is neither convinced nor convincing. His plaint has an odd, impersonal quality. Very different are the emotions and the phrasing in "A Pause of Thought", with their under-throb of disquiet and disillusionment:

Sometimes I said, "It is an empty name
I long for; to a name why should I give
The peace of all the days I have to live?"
Yet gave it all the same.

Alas, thou foolish one! alike unfit
For healthy joy and salutary pain;
Thou knowest the chase is useless and again
Turnest to follow it.

Dante Gabriel's circle of acquaintance was augmented about this time by some notable figures, all of whom swam into the ken of his sister Christina. Among these were Ford Madox Brown, his self-chosen instructor in painting, who lived to design the Irish cross that stands upon his grave; John Everett Millais, precocious, rather a spoilt child, his charming looks marred only a little by his disagreeable speaking voice; Holman Hunt, ardent, whimsical, robustious, whose *Porphyro and Madeline* Dante Gabriel had acclaimed as the finest picture in the Academy exhibition of the year; Hunt's lame *protégé*, Frederick George Stephens, then 'prentice painter, later art critic; Thomas Woolner, an East Anglian with a knack of rhyme, trained by Behnes in the sculptor's craft; and James Collinson—but it is necessary that James Collinson should be detached from the group and considered apart.

During their pious exercises at Christ Church, Albany Street, the attention of the Rossetti ladies had been attracted by the earnest and devout demeanour of an insignificant little man with a thick neck. He was an art-student, living in lodgings in the Polygon, Somer's Town, on an allowance from his family. The Collinsons belonged to the superior tradespeople class; James's father had been a bookseller at Mansfield, and the son's diction still bore traces of his north midland

origin. A more inoffensive, colourless person it would be impossible to imagine. He had no vices and hardly any virtues. He never made and seldom saw a joke, though he was sometimes observed to laugh "in a lachrymose manner". Perhaps his nearest approach to a pleasant vice was his extraordinary somnolence. In the mad tea-parties of his painter friends his rôle was invariably that of the dormouse. It must have astonished them greatly when in 1848 he asserted himself by painting a workmanlike picture, in the style of Wilkie, called *The Charity Boy*, and by becoming a Roman Catholic. Though Dante Gabriel had proclaimed with a loud voice that in the Royal Academy exhibition of that year Holman Hunt's was *the* picture, he was much charmed by Collinson's, and declared that the painter was "a born stunner". In his enthusiasm he even thrust the little man into the newly formed Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, regardless of the misgivings of Millais and Hunt.

The inception of the P.R.B. in the early autumn of 1848, that year of revolutionary movements, has been traced, perhaps with reason, to a book of engravings from the frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa which belonged to Millais, and which broke like a revelation upon the eyes of a group of clever young men weary of the mawkish prettiness and smug pomposity of the prevailing school of painting. Much has been written already, and it is inevitable that much should be written hereafter, concerning the formation, the progress, the achievements, the dissolution, and the repercussions of the P.R.B. Here it will be necessary to touch upon these things—so fascinating in themselves—only in as far as they coloured the thought and

influenced the life of Christina Rossetti. That colour and that influence were conveyed at first along two channels—her bethrothal to Collinson and her association with *The Germ.*

When her enthusiastic brother introduced Collinson to her she was not yet eighteen. What was the outward haviour of her visage we may see from Dante Gabriel's first Pre-Raphaelite picture, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, where she is the Virgin and their mother is St. Anne. The young painter could hardly have found in the whole world a more perfect type of the wistful, unawakened aloofness of the *Ancilla Domini.* The slender girl, sitting at her embroidery frame with her eyes fixed on some far horizon visible to none but her, has something much more rare than beauty, though beauty is not lacking either. It was thus that Collinson beheld her and he immediately fell in love—as well he might. It needs no ghost come from the grave to tell us, as William Michael does, that "in breeding and tone of mind, not to speak of actual genius or advantages of person", his sister was infinitely superior to her wooer. What must always remain incomprehensible, and, indeed, almost inconceivable, was her response to his wooing.

There was an impediment at first; his new faith. It would have been strange if Christina, three-fourths Italian as she was, had had any narrow anti-Roman bias. The philosophic anti-clericalism of her father was not likely to appeal to her—*pace* Richard Garnett in the *Dictionary of National Biography*—and though the Mary of Dante Gabriel's picture had a lifelong prejudice against mariolatry, she regarded Roman Catholics as "living branches of the true Vine". None

the less she refused to betroth herself to that particular living branch which bore the name of James Collinson. This refusal caused him to reconsider his position. The eloquence of Cardinal Wiseman, the example of Dr. Newman, lost something of their persuasive force. After meditation and prayer he reverted to his original Anglican creed, and became the accepted lover of Christina Rossetti.

The poems written by Christina immediately before her meeting with Collinson suggest that she was then perturbed by a vague longing for something—she could not tell what; something which might be divine love or human love; something that might be "easeful death". It is a frame of mind favourable to the composition of poetry, as witness Keats's "Nightingale" and Shelley's "West Wind". If, having met Collinson and plighted her troth to him, she had found what she sought, one would expect the discovery to be recorded, or, at least, hinted at, in the poems of the period during which they were *promessi sposi*, that is to say, between the mid-autumn of 1848 and the early summer of 1850. One would look for a heightening of pitch. And one would look in vain. William Michael gives the titles of ten unpublished 1848 poems and four 1849 ones, but none is suggestive of any sudden kindling of spiritual fires. Some of the titles are intriguing, such as "Grown Cold", "What Sappho would have said had her leap cured instead of killing her", "The Last Complaint", and "A Year Afterwards". Some of these poems may have been addressed to Collinson or inspired by him; but of those which we are permitted to see and which were written at this time there is none, with the great exception of the "Remember Me"

sonnet, which can stand beside the poems of the Cayley period for poignancy, intimacy, or loveliness. The shadow of death seems to lie upon her moving hand almost all through these years; never death dreaded, sometimes death desired. Between the autumn of 1848 and the late summer of 1849 she wrote "She Sat and Sang Alway", "When I am dead, my Dearest", "Bitter for Sweet", "Have Patience", "On Keats", "Symbols", "Three Nuns", "Roses for the Flush of Youth", "Sweet Death", "An End", "For Advent", "Two Pursuits", "Dream Land", "After Death", the second poem of the "Three Stages" triad, "Rest", "One Certainly", "Looking Forward", "Life Hidden", "Remember Me", "Sound Sleep", "A Testimony", and "The Queen Rose". The very titles of most of these smell of mortality.

We may take August 1849 as the apex of the Collinson period. During that month his fiancée paid a visit to his mother and sister at Pleasley Hill, Nottingham. If we read between the lines of Christina's letters it is impossible to doubt that she was utterly out of her element in that smug bourgeois environment. The atmosphere at Charlotte Street may have been depressing at times, and the company a little out-at-elbow, but at least neither was banal. "Though my visit here," she writes to William Michael from Pleasley, "is extremely tolerable, the postman is quite an event in my existence"; and she tells him how she is seeking refuge in day-dreams from the tedium of "local converse" and from the cheap jokes about "beaus" (*sic*) which she is compelled to endure, knitting lace with despairing, unnatural industry, and trying to make Mary Collinson appreciate the charm

of "As I lay a-thynkynge". By the 8th of September Mary has become "Miss Collinson" and by the 19th, Christina, back in London, is explaining to William Michael why their correspondence had come to an end. "Do not imagine that we have been quarrelling; not at all; but she seems to think her brother's affairs so unpromising as to render our continuing to write to each other not pleasant."

William Michael surmises that Mary guessed that her brother was "not unlikely to return to the Roman Catholic Church". This he did in the early summer of 1850; and Christina thereupon revoked her troth, as he must surely have realised that she would. If we had not William Michael's word for it that she took this step "with deep sorrow and reluctance", that "a blight was on her heart and spirits", and that "one day—it may have been within four or five months of the breaking off of the engagement—she happened to see Collinson in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park, and she fainted away in the street", we should be tempted to wonder whether disillusionment had not made the rupture at least endurable. Such a guess might not be far wide of the mark. Both Christina's brothers had been Collinson's firm friends. Dante Gabriel had pleaded "the born stunner's" cause with her; William Michael had consorted with him on the most fraternal terms, had visited his family at Pleasley and gone holiday-making with him in the Isle of Wight. Neither of the young Rossettis would be willing either to believe or to acknowledge that their advocacy joined to their sister's youth and inexperience had led her to imagine that she was in love when she was nothing of the kind.

The famous and beautiful song, "When I am dead, my Dearest", was written in December 1848, presumably—though there is no conclusive internal evidence—to James Collinson. It was the subject of a conversation between William Michael and his sister's first biographer, Mr. Mackenzie Bell, when the question arose as to whether she "always subordinated the wording of her poems to her views as to theological doctrine." William Michael, speaking as one with authority, answered, "I do not say that Christina never used a merely poetic phrase; but I do say that in the main she kept strictly to what she considered theological truth." And "in the main" no doubt she did. It is an elastic and a saving clause. Quite possibly when writing this lovely song she had in mind an intermediate period between death and judgement, and never felt even a momentary doubt as to the ultimate survival of the twin faculties of memory and recognition. On the other hand it is also possible that she may have fallen unconsciously sometimes into some such mood of vague, poetic paganism as that which inspired Swinburne's "Ilicet". At such times she drew near to Lucretius and to Callimachus. When she wrote "Echo" she gave utterance to no misgivings as to the nature of life after death but before resurrection, and she probably felt none then. She writes of Paradise as a place where

> thirsting longing eyes watch the slow door
> That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

This conception of the soul's destiny is implicit in numberless poems of hers. Only now and then, as in "Remember Me", "Who can Say?" "One Testimony", "Rest", "Dream Land", and the first of the "Two

Thoughts of Death", does she suffer a transient suspension of orthodoxy. The second stanza of "When I am dead, my Dearest" need only have been written in Greek to fit perfectly into the posy of Meleager.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sigh on as if in pain;
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise or set
Haply I may remember
And haply may forget.

Christina Rossetti's betrothal to James Collinson coincided with the formation of the P.R.B. and his breakaway from the Brotherhood was the beginning of that process of disintegration which by the end of 1851 had split the queer amalgam into its original component parts. The movement, of course, went on. The five young enthusiasts, Rossetti, Millais, Hunt, Woolner, and Stephens, from whom the first impetus had come continued to paint, sculp, and write with varying degrees of success and with very unequal fidelity to the ideals which had once drawn them together. After *The Germ* had run its brief and disregarded course, it really did germinate. Ruskin took up the Pre-Raphaelite idea; the Reverend E. Young by attacking advertised it; Swinburne, Morris, Burne-Jones, interpreted it each after his own fashion. Even upon Tennyson it left vestigial marks. Its principles were adopted, its implications were accepted. It had been indeed a *porporina foriera del dì*.

But far away in the eighteen-fifties the P.R. Brethren had as little power to launch the movement as they would have had later to stay its course. The

notion that the Brotherhood should have its own literary organ was Dante Gabriel's, and the title first proposed was *Thoughts towards Art and Nature*, soon altered to *The Germ*. William Michael was editor. And on or about January 1, 1850, seven hundred copies of the new periodical were loosed upon an apathetic world. All the original contributors were anonymous. They included the three Rossettis, Ford Madox Brown, Coventry Patmore, and Woolner. Dante Gabriel provided "My Sister's Sleep" and the prose allegory "Hand and Soul"; Christina's contribution consisted of two poems, "Dream Land" and "An End". The second *Germ* struggled into existence in February, graced with three poems by Christina, her brother's "Blessed Damozel", and a dreary blank verse excursion of inordinate length by James Collinson. (Thirty years later Christina commended this last to the Rev. W. Garrett Horder, who was then collecting material for his anthology, *The Poet's Bible*.) Anonymity had now been abandoned, but in her case pseudonymity had been substituted, and Dante Gabriel invented for his sister the demure *nom-de-plume* of "Ellen Alleyn". By April *The Germ* had changed its name to *Art and Poetry*, and under that name it made one more appearance—its fourth and last—a month later. Then it ceased to be; its promoters found themselves confronted with a printer's bill of £33; and a world preoccupied with preparations for the Great Exhibition of 1851 was not even aware that a frail craft carrying precious freight had been lost for lack of a favouring wind.

Christina Rossetti's contributions to *The Germ* were seven in number; "Dream Land", "An End", "A Pause of Thought", "Roses for the Flush of Youth",

"A Testimony", "Repining", and "Sweet Death". All, excepting "Repining", are short lyrical pieces; none is of the quality of "When I am dead, my Dearest" or of "Remember Me". The exclusion of these two is curious, but it may be that Christina, for some reason of her own, did not place them at her brother's disposal. Of those which she offered and he took perhaps "An End" is the most interesting, though Gosse asserts that "Roses for the Flush of Youth" is "not unworthy to be classed with the melodies of Shakespeare, of Burns, and of Shelley". The omission of "One Certainty" is also curious, especially as "A Testimony" follows the same line of thought, derives equally from Ecclesiastes, is longer, weaker, and more cumbered by textual interpolations from Holy Writ. The omitted poem is a sonnet, and no mean one.

Vanity of vanities, the preacher saith,
All things are vanity. The eye and ear
Cannot be filled with what they see and hear.
Like early dew, or like the sudden breath
Of wind, or like the grass that withereth,
Is man, tossed to and fro by hope and fear:
So little joy he has, so little cheer,
Till all things end in the long dust of death.
To-day is still the same as yesterday,
To-morrow also even as one of them;
And there is nothing new under the sun;
Until the ancient race of time be run
The old thorns shall grow out of the old stem
And morning shall be old, and twilight grey.

Christina's choice of the Petrarchan form may have been dictated partly by Dante Gabriel's influence and partly by her own intimate knowledge of Italian literature. It was a fortunate choice. Though she follows her brother in making the octave the flow and the sestet the ebb of the wave, and is therefore able to

indulge her characteristic instinct to recoil as she touches her last line, she is not given that opportunity to sag and flop which the Shakespearean terminal couplet would have given her. Her use of this exquisite vehicle is different from Dante Gabriel's. Where he will

> Hang it with vair and purple dyes

and load every line with imagery, she tends to grave austerity, to the most simple forms and the most indeterminate colours. As Sir Owen Seaman has said:

> If it were not for what has been achieved in sonnet form by Wordsworth, and that only rarely, and sometimes, too, by Shakespeare, by Mrs. Browning, and Christina Rossetti, in giving the highest grace and dignity to common things presented in language free from adornment, we might have supposed, and certainly should have supposed if Rossetti had been our only guide, that elaborate and ornate refinement of language was of necessity an inherent quality in the greatest sonnets.

Christina has her moments of splendour and pomp in this as in every poetical form which she employs, but at her best she is at her most austere. "Remember Me" is even more free from rhetorical trappings than "One Certainty". It contains neither metaphor nor simile, image nor allusion. Anaphora is the only figure she permits herself. The speech is as straightforward, as natural, as the spoken prose of everyday usage; and yet there is in it no line that is not instinct with the purest poetry:

> Remember me when I am gone away,
> Gone far away into the silent land,
> When you can no more hold me by the hand
> Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay;

Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned;
Only remember me: you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve;
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

This sonnet was written six months after "When I am dead, my Dearest", and just before she visited the Collinsons at Pleasley. It was during that dreary visit that she worked upon the second poem of the "Three Nuns" triad. The old *motif* of the unwedded bride, the broken betrothal, the disillusioned dreamer whose "life is breaking like a cloud", had already recurred in "After Death" and in the second of the three poems grouped by William Michael under the title of "Three Stages". The note of disillusionment is strong at this time.

The fruitless thought of what I might have been
Haunting me ever will not let me rest;
A cold north wind has withered all my green,
My sun is in the west.

Here is the same image, almost in the same words, as that which she had used in "The Whole Head is Sick and the Whole Heart Faint" less than a year and a half before. And it is to say the least of it a little curious that this *motif* should have recurred and recurred again at that particular stage of her emotional experience, when she had plighted her troth to one upon whom she must then have built an absolute trust, and with whom she must honestly have believed herself to be in love.

The betrothal was broken off shortly before or

shortly after *The Germ* expired—in May 1850. Collinson's later history was rather unexpected. Three years after his reconversion he entered a Jesuit College as a "working brother"; but becoming discouraged at the necessity of doing some work there, he shortly emerged and resumed his calling of "domestic painter". Ultimately he married and begot a son. William Michael encountered him in middle life, and surmised that the passage of years had sensibly abated the ardour of his religious convictions.

During the year 1850 Christina's output of verse, or, at least, that part of it which has been preserved, had a languid, lifeless quality. The period is unrepresented in William Michael's list of the poems omitted by him from the two posthumous collections, and even of the 1850 MSS. which she suffered to survive she chose only one, "Twilight Calm", when she was selecting the "other poems" for the *Goblin Market* volume twelve years later. Her sorrow was not then of the quality that brings forth great poetry. For the moment she was stunned. Perhaps Dante Gabriel when he wrote *Rose Mary* may have had in mind the solace which his sister found at this time in the sympathy of their mother:

> "Enough, my daughter", the mother said,
> And took to her breast the bending head;
> "Rest, poor head, with my heart below,
> While love still lulls you as long ago."

It was in 1850 that Dante Gabriel himself met and fell promptly in love with Elizabeth Siddal, and painted the water-colour portrait of her known as *Rossavestita.* His brother presumes that the head of the Virgin in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* had been painted before he met

her, but adds that "under any circumstances he would perhaps have taken this head from Christina to keep the work in harmony with *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*". In that "white daub" which some of his best critics have ranked as his most poetic conception Dante Gabriel had too true an instinct to set the image of his flame-tressed *inamorata*. The Pre-Raphaelites liked painting composites and his younger sister was not his only model; yet we may accept that wistful, troubled, ascetic face as the essential Christina in the twentieth year of her age.

CHAPTER III

THE GREY YEARS—"GOBLIN MARKET AND OTHER POEMS"

NOTHING is more curious in the mentality of Christina Rossetti than her almost complete independence of external stimuli. "My knowledge of what is called nature", she once said, "is that of the town sparrow." After the brief and early interludes at Holmer Green she saw little of any birds and beasts except those in Regent's Park or in Dante Gabriel's miniature menagerie at Cheyne Walk, and Watts-Dunton said with truth that she was wont to speak of wild animals "sometimes as though they were human beings and sometimes as though they were fairies". The flowers of her predilection are the Biblical rose and lily; and the various species so conscientiously described in *Called to be Saints* were borrowed from a textbook on botany. Sea-creatures interested her more than flowers, and she had a lifelong love for what she called "marine trophies", but the sea itself she knew only as those may know it who watch the waves from a sophisticated beach. Her Somerset sojourn in 1853 seems to have left few and faint impressions on her mind, and even from Penkill Castle she brought scant memories save those of a milliped which invaded her

turret chamber. Yet now and then a sudden awareness would come upon her, as when she was writing "Twilight Calm" or "Mirrors of Life and Death", and she would awake to a sensitive consciousness of the colours and forms, the tricks and habits, of Nature and Nature's children. These moods were infrequent. All lyric poets tend to be subjective, and none was ever more obedient than she to the injunction,

> . . . Look in thy heart and write!

She seldom looked elsewhere.

Maria Francesca and Christina went to Brighton shortly after the breaking-off of the Collinson engagement. Perhaps it was felt by the family that the change of scene and the contemplation of shingle, fishing-nets, and bathing-women would help to efface his image from the mind of the younger sister. Her vision remained bent inward as before, and so far was she from forgetting the little man, she actually wrote to ask William Michael to find out whether "Mr. Collinson is as delicate as he used to be". At the moment Collinson, possibly inspired by *The Saint's Tragedy*, was working upon a picture of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. There is some doubt as to the date of Christina's poem dedicated to that rather distressful saint; if it was November 1850, as stated in the *Family Letters of Christina Rossetti*, the current of thought must have run on uninterruptedly from middle of the same year; if June 1852, as stated in the collected edition of 1904, there must have been a resurgence of interest in Elizabeth after an interval of nearly two years. The poem itself is a poor thing enough, but it suggests that Collinson was not easily forgotten; at least, not by his

former betrothed. More than thirty years after their final parting she quoted some lines of his in *Time Flies*. At Brighton, on the morrow of that parting, she read Layard's *Nineveh*, the source of one of Dante Gabriel's finest poems, but it inspired her to no visions of buried temples or winged bulls.

Christina's hand was certainly "out" at this time. The lugubrious and flaccid *Maude*, a prose tale interspersed with poor verse, is almost the only considerable work of 1850. Two lines,

> Fade, tender lily,
> Fade, O crimson rose,

are like a queer foretaste of the roses and lilies which encumber another and very different *Maud* published five years later. The delicate chisel-work of the 1851–1852 poems is half obscured by a patina of melancholy. In the earlier group stands the extraordinarily vivid triad called "Three Enemies" and the edifying though desperately over-serious "Behold I stand at the Door". "Moonshine", published posthumously, followed in 1852. Here the form is conditioned by the Pre-Raphaelite passion for ballad measures, but the content, allegorical, unearthly, a thin woof of phantom colours, is Christina's own. William Michael places "Moonshine" among the devotional poems, from which it would appear that the supernatural lover with whom the maiden embarks upon an unknown sea is Christ.

> Saith she, "Like silver
> Shines thy hair, not gold";
> Saith she, "I shiver
> In thy steady hold."

Here already are the muted cadences and the lunar rainbow coloration of "Sleep at Sea".

Other poems of the period, "A fair World though a Fallen", "After All", and "From the Antique" among them, have that languid gracile quality so closely akin to morbidity that only a very acute critical perception can distinguish between the two. The third is one of the most pagan of all her lyrics; it is "When I am dead, my Dearest" contracted as in a diminishing glass, with the 'I' changed to 'we':

> The wind shall lull us yet,
> The flowers shall spring above us,
> And those who hate forget,
> And those forget who love us.

Most of the poems belonging to this phase were left by Christina in manuscript. Her reticence, though it permitted her to publish "Remember Me" and "What would I Give", had its inhibitions which no one else could have understood and which it is conceivable that she herself did not fully understand.

Meanwhile the fortunes of the Rossetti family continued to ebb, and early in 1851 Mrs. Rossetti took the heroic decision to open a day school in the not very promising or distinguished neighbourhood of Camden Town. There was nothing of Emma Micawber in Frances Rossetti, and yet it is impossible to forget that brass plate upon the faded front-door in Windsor Terrace, City Road, when one reads of these efforts to start an academy for young ladies. Christina, of course, helped her mother in the surely uncongenial task of "teaching the small daughters of the neighbouring hairdresser or the neighbouring pork-butcher their p's and q's". When the little Morleenas dispersed for their summer holidays, their preceptress went to Longleat, to visit her Aunt Charlotte Polidori

at the invitation of Lady Bath. And here again comes an example of her impermeability by external images. Writing from a lovely old house in one of the most enchanting corners of England she can only remark that "there is a (to me) singular plant in the garden; one flower of it swarms with ants. Its appearance is something like a thistle", or ask, "Did you ever taste bread-fruit?" adding, "We had some yesterday; it reminded me of an indifferent pear".

Christina never took up the family profession of resident governess, nor did she after 1855 go in for teaching at all. Her nearest approach to "governessing" was, as William Michael emphasises, "passing a week or a month or so with some acquaintance, conversing in Italian, and so bettering a knowledge of that language among the young ladies of the house". During the summer of 1852 she was coaching the daughters of Mr. Swynfen Jervis at Durlaston Hall, Staffordshire, an interlude commemorated by Dante Gabriel in a lively caricature. Thenceforward the day school in Arlington Street, Camden Town, languished apace, and it became obvious that its extinction was at hand. Aunt Charlotte then intervened. Lady Bath had recently appointed to the living of Frome-Selwood the rather notorious ritualistic parson, Mr. Bennett, whose method of conducting divine service was afterwards most irreverently described by Disraeli as "High Jinks". It was "conjectured that with some countenance from him" Mrs. Rossetti and her younger daughter might be able to conduct a day school at Frome with a fair prospect of success. Christina and her father and mother accordingly transferred themselves to Somerset in the spring of 1853, Maria Francesca,

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Dante Gabriel, and William Michael remaining in London. All this time the elder brother was feeling ever more tight about his heart "one strangling golden hair" from the lambent head of "the Sid".

Apart from the difficulties and perplexities inherent in such a transplanting, Christina found the air of the dull little town even less breathable than the air of Arlington Street. If the school had prospered the young schoolmistress would still have been out of her element there, divorced from the companionship of her sister and brothers, and with only too much empty leisure to

> Sing of a love lost and forgotten,
> Sing of a joy finished and o'er.

For part of the time she was alone with her fast-failing father, while Mrs. Rossetti tended the death-bed of old Mrs. Polidori in London. She tried to amuse herself with drawing, which she had studied in a perfunctory way under Ford Madox Brown, and which she may have had some idea of using as a substitute for the musical instruction she was not qualified to impart to her pupils. She continued to write verse. And, oddly enough, some of the things written at Frome are as gay as anything of hers could be; for example, "In my Cottage near the Styx" and the two jingles on the P.R.B. Of these two the second begins with an almost Byronic lilt and swagger:

> The P.R.B. is in its decadence;
> For Woolner in Australia cooks his chops,
> And Hunt is yearning for the land of Cheops,
> D. G. Rossetti shuns the vulgar optic,
> And William M. Rossetti—

Well, his salary having been recently raised to £250

at the Inland Revenue office and he himself having been appointed art critic on the staff of the *Spectator*, William M. Rossetti was able in the ensuing year to offer a home to his mother, father, and sisters in Albany Street, Regent's Park. By this time it had become abundantly clear that poor Mrs. Rossetti would never, like Miss Drum in Christina's *Commonplace*, retire "on a comfortable competence earned by her own exertions". So William Michael, the most unselfish, the most devoted of sons and brothers, gathered his family about him in that long, unlovely street which runs between Park Village and Marylebone Road. It must have been shortly before she left London for Frome that Christina visited Holman Hunt's studio opposite the sturdy brick tower of Old Chelsea Church and sat to him for the eyes and brow of that curious composite head of Christ in *The Light of the World*; and it may have been during one of these sittings that he communicated to her his yearnings for the land of Cheops. About the same period John Brett, the marine painter, "seemed to be somewhat smitten" with her, though it would appear that, like Mr. Pidger, he "never told his love".

After the death of the Polidori grandparents the family circle disintegrated into lodgings, the eccentric misanthropy of Philip and the emphatic individualism of Eliza rendering the dispersal necessary. They all remained in the Regent's Park neighbourhood, and we may imagine the aunts rustling devoutly into Christ Church with their two soberly clad nieces, and kneeling before the tenebrous copy of Raphael's *Transfiguration*. This can hardly be the church of which Dante Gabriel wrote

having entered it we shall find there
Silence and sudden dimness and deep prayer
And faces of crowned angels round about,

and it is desperately ugly outside; but its association with the ladies of his family gives it a peculiar interest to students of Rossetti chronicles.

Early in 1854 the family made the acquaintance of John Ruskin, whose weighty championship of the Pre-Raphaelite idea did so much to fortify and extend the movement, though it came too late to hold the disintegrating Brotherhood together. In April of that year Gabriele Rossetti died, without reverting to the orthodox Catholicism in which he had been bred, but with the words "*Ah Dio, ajutami Tu!*" upon his lips. It was probably a source of solace to his wife and daughters that his last labour should have been the compilation of a volume of Italian hymns, the *Arpa Evangelica*. Before the year ended another gap was made in the Albany Street circle by the departure of Aunt Eliza for Scutari. That most adventurous and enterprising of spinster ladies kindled in the heart of her younger niece a strange desire to go with her, following whither Miss Nightingale had led; and but for Santa Philomena's most prudent stipulation as to the age of her associates the desire might have been fulfilled. It is interesting, though perhaps unprofitable, to speculate upon what might have been the effect upon Christina's verse of the exotic scenery and the sights of war.

William Michael has described as one of his sister's "most energetic utterances and a highly characteristic one" the sonnet called "The World", written two months after their father's death. He ought to know; and as regards the temper and purpose of the poem he

is doubtless right. What is hardly characteristic is the personification of the world as a woman with

> subtle serpents gliding in her hair,

an image much more in the manner of Dante Gabriel. There soon followed the third poem of the triad, begun in 1848, with "A Pause of Thought". If other evidence did not point to a period some six years later as marking the dawn of her love for Charles Bagot Cayley we might have conjectured that it was of him she was thinking when she wrote:

> I thought to shut myself and dwell alone
> Unseeking and unsought.
> But first I tired and then my care grew slack;
> Till my heart dreamed and maybe wandered too;
> I felt the sunshine glad again and knew
> The swallow on its track.

There is an enigmatic quality in much of Christina's verse of this period; in the "Ballad", with its most unballad-like first line, "Soft white lamb in the daisy meadow", and its fugitive snatches of genuine ballad rhythm; in "A Soul"; in "Long Looked For"; all left unannotated by her brother. Before the year ended some resurgent memory or some half-imagined, half-remembered experience, drew forth "Echo", one of the most interesting of her shorter lyrics, and one of the hardest to interpret in the light of her personal history. It certainly seems as if an influence was now at work which sent the blood with a new and fuller music through her erewhile languid pulses.

> The sap will surely quicken, soon or late,
> The tardiest bird will twitter to a mate;
> . . . . .
> Sing, voice of Spring,
> Till I, too, blossom, and rejoice and sing.

So she sang in "The First Spring Day", a day in March 1855.

Answering his own question, "Did Christina Rossetti consider herself truly a poetess and a good one?" William Michael says, "Truly a poetess, most decidedly yes; and within the range of her subject and thought, and the limits of her executive endeavour, a good one". Her natural—it was never unnatural—humility was tempered not only by her own poetic instincts but by the judgement of her kindred and her friends. As early as 1855 the project of a collected edition of her poems was in the air, and Dante Gabriel lent a sheaf of her manuscripts to William Allingham so that he might "give his opinion as to which would be best for a volume". The book did not actually emerge till 1862, but in the interim Allingham reprinted in *Nightingale Valley* the Italianate little song called "An End", which had appeared in *The Germ*, and *Macmillan's Magazine*, then under the editorship of David Masson, published three poems of hers. Other less illustrious periodicals here and there were also opening their columns to her, and she was busying herself with prose as well, helping her younger brother with his translation of Mallet du Pan and contributing articles on Italian celebrities to the *Imperial Dictionary of Biography*. The distaste for Dante which old Mr. Rossetti's hard-driven theories had forced upon his children was now a thing of the past. Italian influences were very potent with Christina between 1855 and 1862, especially at the time when her friendship with Cayley was deepening and when Dante Gabriel was engaged upon his *Early Italian Poets*.

Dante Gabriel's marriage interposed between himself and his family a barrier of which Christina was more acutely conscious than the others. He suspected her, probably with justice, of being deficient in appreciation of Guggums, and it would be difficult to imagine a type of woman less likely to appeal to her in the character of his wife. Did she ever show him her sonnet "In an Artist's Studio"? She never published it, but neither did she destroy it, and it remains a document of the highest significance. There is some uncertainty as to whether "Wife to Husband", written in 1861 and included in the *Goblin Market* volume, really refers to poor Lizzie, as William Michael suggests that it may. If it does, Christina had as fine a perception of her sister-in-law's better qualities and as subtle an insight into her emotions as anyone, not excluding the infatuated Dante Gabriel. After this fashion the "Wife" of this poignant little poem speaks:

Pardon the faults in me
For the love of years ago;
Good-bye.
I must drift across the sea,
I must sink into the snow,
I must die.

The untutored mind of Lizzie Siddal was like wax, responsive to any deep-cut seal. One might have expected her own verse, such as it is, to bear the impress of her husband's thought and diction.[1] Strangely enough, the best of her poor little lyrics, the one quoted in the *Family Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, derives rather from the poetry of the grave-eyed sister-in-law concerning whose opinion of herself she

[1] Swinburne, of course, considered that it *did*.

can have been under no illusions. The last quatrain is especially reminiscent of Christina's more languid style:

> I stretch my hands in the long grass,
> And fall to sleep again,
> There to lie empty of all love
> As beaten corn of grain.

John Ruskin, so responsive to the charm of Maria Francesca's conversation and the grace of Lizzie's water-colours, failed altogether in his judgement of Christina as a poet. Though, at Dante Gabriel's suit, he put in a word for her with the editor of *Cornhill*, it seems to have been a half-hearted intercession and no tangible result followed. Neither did an attempt to enlist the good offices of Mrs. Gaskell prove any more availing. The time was now approaching when no advocate or mediator would be required. "Up Hill" appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* for February 1861,[1] and immediately caught the attention of discerning lovers of poetry. "A Birthday" followed in April and "An Apple-Gathering" in August. Neither John Ruskin's imperfect appreciation nor Mrs. Gaskell's failure to 'place' what Dante Gabriel called "the Poem about the two Girls and the Goblins" held up the advancing wheels of Christina's chariot long. The firm of Macmillan, with whom her associations from first to last were of the happiest, soon decided to publish a selection of her poems, with two black-and-white illustrations by her brother.

It was in March 1862 that the slim volume entitled *Goblin Market and Other Poems* was given to the world. Dante Gabriel's frontispiece shows a full-

[1] Not January 1860, as stated by William Michael.

throated lady of the type he was later to make famous, the Lizzie Siddal type, and illustrates the line, "Buy from us with a golden curl"; in the title-page design both sisters conform to that type, and a floating globe enorbs the dream which is haunting one of them. The engraving of these cuts has been attributed to William Morris but was actually done by C. J. Faulkner.

Of the sixty odd poems in this volume "Goblin Market" is at once the longest, the most original, and —with the possible exception of "When I am dead, my Dearest"—the best known. The quality of the others is a little unequal, and there are several that one could well have spared; but the richness and significance of the collection will be realised when it is remembered that here, within less than two hundred pages, were gathered together "At Home", "A Birthday", "Remember Me", "An End", "An Apple-Gathering", "Echo", "A Peal of Bells", "A Pause of Thought", "Twilight Calm", "Wife to Husband", "Shut Out", "When I am dead, my Dearest", "Dead Before Death", "The First Spring Day", "Rest", "Up Hill", "The Convent Threshold", "The Three Enemies", "In the Round Tower at Jhansi", "The One Certainty", "The World", "Sleep at Sea", "Advent", "Old and New Year Ditties", the third being "Passing Away", "Mirage", and "What would I give?" Small wonder that, as Gosse wrote, "where Morris, Swinburne, and Meredith had failed to penetrate the Philistine fortress, Christina Rossetti in her *Goblin Market* had succeeded": small wonder that Swinburne called her "the Jael who led their host to victory".

A more aloof and demure Jael it would be difficult

to conceive, or one between whom and the Captains of the host there were more curious differences and divergences of mind and purpose. We have William Michael's word for it—a somewhat oracular word—that Morris's poems "were mostly unread by her, not unvalued". *Atalanta in Calydon* she "recognised as a stupendous masterpiece", though in the copy given to her by the author she pasted strips of paper over two lines in the great central chorus. Swinburne was from first to last her faithful and diffident admirer, but it was hard for her to do him justice. His unorthodoxy and also—it may be—his enthusiastic regard for Lizzie Siddal warped her judgement. Death made these odds all even when he laid upon Christina's grave the tribute of a noble elegy.

One of the earliest admirers of "Goblin Market" was Mrs. Caroline Norton, who compared it to "The Ancient Mariner". It has, indeed, certain vague affinities with more than one of Coleridge's dream-poems, as well as with Hogg's "Kilmeny", while those who care to look for them may find here and there half-obliterated traces of Allingham's song of the "little men",

> Trooping all together,
> Green jacket, red cap,
> And white owl's feather.

Yet in its essence and in its substance "Goblin Market" is Christina Rossetti's own, inalienably hers, a self-evolved world of strange beauty and terror, whose ageless denizens are not debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh, and whose woods and waters are unknown of the visiting moon. The main point of difference between Christina's phantasms and S. T. C.'s is in their genesis. In his case the poem forms itself

from the fumes of poppy and mandragora; in hers, we have an act of pure imaginative creation. William Michael more than once heard his sister say that "she did not mean anything profound by this fairy-tale", and he seems to have been disconcerted to find that people do not always see "the central point of the story as the authoress intended it". He forgot that to look for a plot and a moral in such a labyrinth of fantastic loveliness would be mere oppugnancy and wasted valour. Plot and moral are both there, but if one hacks away the rich growth that hides them they will surely dwindle and die. The challenge of "Goblin Market" must always be to the eye and the ear rather than to the intellect.

It was apparently from her mother that Christina inherited this whimsical streak. The gold-girt crocodiles of "My Dream", the bewigged pig and the flying mouse of *Sing-Song*, the floating tea-trays of *Speaking Likenesses*, the metamorphosed fisher-girl in "Hero", all attest its existence, though it tended to fade out as years passed. In "Goblin Market" it found its finest expression, for there the grotesque element is subordinated to the poetical and the weird images are a mere border of imps and monsters framing a miniature wrought in vermilion, ultramarine, and gold. There is something in the abrupt, disconnected opening of the poem which suggests its unearthly atmosphere:

> Morning and evening
> Maids heard the goblins cry.

As to who the maids were, or when and where they lived, no hint is given. Of the three Christian names revealed, two, Jeanie and Lizzie, are simple and homely,

while the third, Laura, is certainly not outlandish. But in what strange glen do these goblin-haunted damsels dwell, where there are no men to guard them, no women to give them good counsel, where there is no church whither they may go to pray? The two sisters whose trafficking with the goblins forms the theme of the poem occupy themselves as two fairy princesses might in some Trianon beyond the sunset:

> Laura rose with Lizzie,
> Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
> Aired and set to rights the house,
> Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
> Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
> Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
> Fed their poultry, sat and sewed,
> Talked as modest maidens should.

But always at dawn and dusk among the brookside rushes where the maids go with their pitchers to draw water there is the pattering and rustling, the creeping and scrambling of the goblins. The creatures themselves are as uncouth as the grotesques of the Louttrell Psalter; they are imps, not elves, and bear no kinship to the fairies of *Nymphidia* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> One had a cat's face,
> One whisked a tail,
> One tramped at a rat's pace,
> One crawled like a snail,
> One like a wombat prowled obese and furry,
> One like a ratel tumbled hurry-skurry.

The bewildering variety of the fruits which they press upon Laura in exchange for a curl from her golden head is in marked contrast to the comparatively narrow range of Christina's flower-lore; and the extraordinary manner in which image is piled on image and simile

on simile lends to the whole poem something of the crowded incoherence of a Buddhist stupa. Rhyme and metre are both irregular, like the scurrying of elfin feet.

Some of the similes are exquisitely felicitous; for example those clustered round Laura's neck:

> Like a rush-embedded swan,
> Like a lily from the beck,
> Like a moonlit poplar branch,
> Like a vessel at the launch
> When its last restraint is gone.

There is a steady heightening of pitch as the poem proceeds, till when Lizzie has dared the wrath of the goblin rout for love of Laura we get the unforgettable vision of her standing among them,

> Like a royal virgin town
> Topped with gilded dome and spire,
> Close beleaguered by a fleet
> Mad to tug her standard down.

Again, when Lizzie returns to Laura, her lips stained with the fatal fruits, simile jostles simile to express the despair of the younger sister, who thinks that the elder is lost even as she, and who now loathes the taste of the goblins' wares.

> Her locks streamed like the torch
> Borne by a racer at full speed,
> Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
> Or like an eagle when she stems the sun,
> Or like a caged thing freed,
> Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Thereafter the pace of the poem slackens, the images become sparse, until with a delicate *diminuendo* it ends on a tribute from Laura to Lizzie, intended to be taken by Maria Francesca as a tribute from Christina to her:

> There is no friend like a sister
> In calm or stormy weather.

Gosse is probably right in indicating "Goblin Market" as the poem with which Christina stormed the fortress of Philistinism. Its appeal was to the senses and the emotions. Its quaintness, its beauty, its swift, vivid movement, enchanted many readers who would have condemned "An End" and "Dead Before Death" as mawkish if not positively maudlin. It was not easy to forget; it was not easy to disregard. It fulfilled what a very great critic has defined as the chief function of literature—to give pleasure.

The original title was "A Peep at the Goblins". Dante Gabriel suggested the alteration to "Goblin Market" and it was he who induced Christina to re-christen the poignant little poem beginning, "When I was dead my spirit turned", and to call it "At Home" instead of "After the Picnic". Her *flair* for an effective title was sometimes keen, while at others it failed utterly. "Sleep at Sea", for instance, that eerie allegory belonging to the same imaginative order as "Moonshine" and "A Ballad of Boding", bore in the first instance the almost repellent heading "Something like Truth".

Christina's plan of grouping her definitely devotional pieces together at the end of the book gave an opportunity to the Anglican reading public to adopt, or, at least, to recognise her as a writer in the succession of Herbert, Ken, and Keble, quite apart from her character as a Pre-Raphaelite poetess. Yet the first appeal of her verse was not to the pious or the orthodox, even when the theme was itself compact of piety and orthodoxy. "Passing Away", which Swinburne "speci-

ally loved", was described by the agnostic William Michael as "the finest sacred poem in the language". The earliest of her published poems to be "accepted by poetical readers as an observable thing" was "Up Hill", perhaps the most intellectually satisfying of all her meditative lyrics. There the metaphor is sustained with quiet and effortless gravity and grace from the first line to the last, unblurred by any touch of misapplied colour or by any lowering or raising of the pitch. Technically it is almost perfect; even the unexpected lengthening of certain lines justifies itself, and is like a well-placed *rallentando* in a bar of solemn music.

> Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
> Yes, to the very end.
> Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
> From morn to night, my friend.
>
> But is there for the night a resting-place,
> A roof for when the slow, dark hours begin?
> May not the darkness hide it from my face?
> You cannot miss that inn.
>
> Shall I meet other wayfarers at night,
> Those who have gone before?
> Then must I knock, or call, when just in sight?
> You cannot miss that door.
>
> Shall I find comfort, travel-stained and weak?
> Of labour you shall find the sum.
> Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
> Yea, beds for all who come.

Such a poem as this, breaking upon the England of 1861, was indeed "an observable thing"!

The double influence of Tennyson and Dante Gabriel was responsible for most of Christina Rossetti's excursions into the ballad form. There is no mould into which her favourite broken betrothal *motif* can more readily be made to run, and she uses it again and

again; in "Maude Clare", in "Noble Sisters", in "The Ghost's Petition", in "A Bird's-Eye View". Happy endings cramp her, and there is something a little unconvincing about "Love from the North". That good critics saw a Tennysonian tincture in some of her longer poems she was well aware. Dante Gabriel had been anxious that something should be done to make "From House to Home" less like "The Palace of Art", and she had done nothing. Her conscience acquitted her of any deliberate echoing of the Laureate's characteristic idiom, and there may have been wisdom as well as a certain streak of obduracy in her attitude. She borrowed no fire from him, and if she sometimes suffered her own light to shine through the coloured casement of his style that meant no subordination of her genius to his. Even in "From House to Home" there are many stanzas that could have come from no hand but hers.

> Azure and sun were starved from heaven above,
> No dew had fallen, the biting frost lay hoar;
> Oh, love, I knew that I should meet my love,
> Should find my love no more.

It is the old cry of disillusionment and frustration, made articulate with the old haunting poignancy of form and phrase. Already, in the thirty-second year of her age, Christina's lyrical quality was defined and stabilised. In ballads she might follow Dante Gabriel, in narratives and allegories she might set her feet where Tennyson had led the way; but in her lyrics she was what she had always been—passionately herself, and so she was to remain to the end.

CHAPTER IV

CHARLES BAGOT CAYLEY—"THE PRINCE'S PROGRESS"

ENIGMATIC to the last, Elizabeth Siddal Rossetti departed this life in February 1862. The house in Chatham Place, Blackfriars, where they had lived together was thenceforth an intolerable place to Dante Gabriel. He conceived the happy project of gathering round him in a rambling Queen Anne dwelling in Cheyne Walk not only his whole family, womankind included, but also such of his men friends as were likely by their society to bring him solace. Foremost in the second group stood the tenuous, flame-crested figure of his "little Northumbrian friend", Algernon Charles Swinburne, and next to him the stooping form of George Meredith.

The heterogeneous band of beasts which Rossetti afterwards kept in his riverside home, wombat, zebu, armadillo, peacock, kangaroo, racoon, were not more incongruously assembled than his mother, sisters, and aunts would have been under the same roof with these unorthodox and unconventional young poets. Happily the attempt to conjoin such incompatibles was never made. "Before the time came for actually removing to Cheyne Walk," writes William Michael, "my brother reached the conclusion—a sound one—that

that would not be the most apposite of homes for his female relatives, who therefore remained in Albany Street." Mrs. Rossetti and Christina, however, made the not inconsiderable excursion from Regent's Park to Chelsea now and then, to visit Dante Gabriel and the odd denizens, human and otherwise, of his confused, fantastic house and garden. It must have given Christina peculiar pleasure to make the acquaintance of a wombat at close quarters, for one of these creatures

prowled obese and furry

all over the place. Her affection for the *Uommibatti* dated from a visit paid to the Zoo with William Michael towards the year 1858, and communicated itself in due course to her elder brother, to Charles Bagot Cayley, and to Edward Burne-Jones.

During the late summer of 1863 or 1864 the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson took a series of photographs in the garden of Tudor House, Cheyne Walk, and so placed on record the grave beauty of Mrs. Rossetti, the un-Englishness, swarthiness, and stockiness of Dante Gabriel, and the curious aloofness of Christina. One of these photographs, reproduced in the *Family Letters of Christina Rossetti*, was taken at the foot of the garden steps where the unswept leaves lay thick upon the ground. Christina in an ample dress of some dark-coloured silk, her sharply peaked chin resting on her right hand, sits looking up at her mother, whose head is turned slightly towards her. To their right and left stand the two Rossetti brothers, shaggy and self-conscious, in ill-fitting and eminently post-Raphaelite clothes. Another of Lewis Carroll's groups, to be found in Mackenzie Bell's monograph,

shows Christina seated at her mother's feet, leaning back against her knee; they are both looking at a paper-covered book which they support with their right hands. The impression of Mrs. Rossetti is perhaps less sympathetic here than in the larger group, but there is a curious charm in her daughter's delicately defined profile, a charm which illuminates William Michael's allusion to "the subdued dignity and elegant (though not fashionable) quietude of her aspect". Yet concessions are made to fashion, too. Her crinoline is of quite adequate dimensions, and the frilled sleeves ending in ruffled white cuffs, the little knots of silk or braid upon the bodice, suggest that she felt no unnatural and unfeminine indifference to the prevailing vogue, however far she might be from any zealous pursuit of it.

The period between the publication of Christina Rossetti's first and second books was roughly that covered by her love-affair—if love-affair it can be called—with Charles Bagot Cayley. There could hardly be a sharper contrast than that between her first and second lovers. Collinson was a plebeian of very moderate intellectual attainments, Cayley was a gentleman and a scholar; Collinson was sometimes observed to "laugh in a lachrymose manner", Cayley "smiled much, in a furtive way, as if there were some joke which he alone appreciated in full"; Collinson was steadfast neither in his love nor in his religion, Cayley remained loyal to a hopeless passion and faithful even to the infidelity which made it hopeless. We owe most of our knowledge of Cayley to William Michael, who tells us that he was "a singularly unworldly person, which was no doubt in my sister's eyes a merit and not a blemish". Absent-minded,

myopic, whimsical, chivalrous, and poor, here was the man who of all others was fitted to win and to hold the love of a woman like Christina Rossetti, to draw out her protective instincts, to satisfy her spiritual cravings, to be to her at one and the same time a way and an end. He loved her and she knew it. And in 1864 she wrote the three stanzas headed *A Sketch* which were found among her papers after her death. "It is clear to me", comments William Michael, "that the person here bantered is Charles Bagot Cayley, a man eminently unpractical in habit of mind, and abstracted and wool-gathering in demeanour. It is equally clear that by the date when the verses were written . . . Christina, though the least forward of women, had evinced towards him an amount of graciousness which a man of ordinary alertness would not have overlooked."

> The blindest buzzard that I know
> Does not wear wings to spread and stir;
> Nor does my special mole wear fur
> And grub among the roots below.

So she begins, and after touching the *Sketch* here and there with light and affectionate little strokes, she ends:

> My blindest buzzard that I know,
> My special mole, when will you see?
> Oh, no, you must not look at me,
> There's nothing hid for me to show.
> I might show facts as plain as day;
> But since your eyes are blind you'd say
> "Where? What?" and turn away.

But the blindness of the buzzard did not prove to be impenetrable. He neither said, "Where? What?" nor turned away. On the contrary, he proposed

marriage[1] formally and ceremoniously, disregarding with characteristic unworldiness the fact that he was almost as poor as she. This common impecuniosity was not the reason why

> Hope reborn one pleasant morn
> Died at even.

Once again it was a scruple of conscience which brought Christina's dreams to naught. In the case of Collinson the breach had come because he belonged to a different branch of the Catholic Church from her; in the case of Cayley they could not marry because he belonged to none.

> Ma a me preferisti la virtude,
> La veritade, amico;

she wrote sorrowfully and admiringly in 1867.

It may seem a little curious that she should have known him so long and grown to love him so well without, as her brother put it, having "probed his faith". Perhaps she took it for granted that one who was so "sib" to herself in mind and body could not be alien in spirit, or she may have hoped to win him to her own way of thinking. On the other hand it is possible that a fine reticence kept her from trying to learn how he stood spiritually while yet he was blind emotionally. "He may", says her brother, "have considered Christianity the best of all religions, but not as being on a different plane from others, absolute truth as contrasted with fallacy." For Christina

[1] In his *Reminiscences* William Michael gives the date of this event as "in or about 1864"; in the *Family Letters of Christina Rossetti* it is given as 1866.

there could be no half-tones. To her religion was something absolute, static, ineluctable. She interpreted in their most rigid sense the words "He who is not for Me is against Me". Cayley's shy lack of conviction, his gentle detachment from sects and dogmas, prevented her from marrying him, but they could not prevent her from loving him with a profound and enduring love. The poems, English and Italian, which this love inspired her to write are among the finest she ever wrote. Mrs. Browning's dictum that "hopeless grief is passionless" was never true of Christina Rossetti.

Every poet and almost every student of poetry knows that a poem which bears on its surface all the recognised signs of personal experience may in fact be a pure figment of the mind, unrelated to any event in the poet's life or any chapter in his history. It would obviously be going too far to accept every love-song and every lament of Christina's written after 1860 as a faithful reflection of her innermost heart; yet it is neither impertinent nor unreasonable to regard certain songs of hers, especially those written between 1860 and 1884, as the direct outcome of this forlorn and yet tenacious passion. In the early 'sixties her mood fluctuated between the dejection of "Life and Death", the vague flickering hopes of "Twilight Night", the wistful questioning of "Somewhere or Other", and the heart-sick hunger of "What would I give?" These fluctuations are usually independent of external conditions. One feels almost sure that Shakespeare's thirty-third and ninety-eighth Sonnets were written in the spring and the seventy-third in the autumn; but Christina, writing in April, could

sing of "shrunk leaves dropping in the wood", while in January she will carol of the season:

> When Robin's not a beggar,
> And Jenny Wren's a bride,
> And larks hang singing, singing, singing,
> Over the wheatfields wide,
> And anchored lilies ride,
> And the pendulum spider swings from side to side.

During this period of spiritual instability her health remained precarious, and she paid several visits to Hastings on that account. The place pleased her; she remembered its "pleasant pebbly strand" in the seventeenth of her *Later Life* sonnets, and tried to write of its fisherfolk in one of the ingenuous short stories included in the *Commonplace* volume. Yet here, as elsewhere, her subjectivity dominates. Even the journey which she made to Italy with her mother and younger brother in 1865 left comparatively vague traces on her verse. They visited Como, Pavia, Brescia, Bergamo, and Milan, returning by way of the Splügen, Schaffhausen, and Strasburg. Of the two poems which her Italian voyagings inspired, one, "Italia, Io Ti Saluto", was published in *A Pageant and other Poems* seventeen years later; the other, "En Route" perhaps the more characteristic, was found among her garnered manuscripts after her death. Both are good; in both there is a sense of irrevocable severance from something long dreamed of and greatly loved; but of colour, image, landscape, horizon, there is no trace. Though William Michael was inclined to regret that his sister could not live in Italy instead of in England, she herself does not seem to have been sorry, as she said,

To come back from the sweet South to the North
Where I was born, bred, look to die;
Come back to do my day's work in its day,
Play out my play—
Amen, amen, say I.

She was too intelligent a woman, and had been too well brought up by her mother, to pass through unfamiliar scenes and feel and write nothing. There are memories of the Rigi, of the forget-me-nots of St. Gothard, and of the Como nightingales in *Later Life*; writing to her friend Anne Gilchrist she says the correct, conventional things about the "unimaginable beauties and grandeur of Nature"; in *Time Flies* we learn that the Italian poppies are less intensely scarlet than the English and that in Northern Italy "the pigs are exceptionally mean and repulsive". Yet she who in "Goblin Market" and "A Birthday" wove a tapestry that dazzles the eyes of the mind could find no words, did not even attempt to find any words, wherewith to catch and keep something of the characteristic colour of Italy. She was always better able to suggest realities of which she had no personal knowledge, as when she writes:

Beyond the lands we see stretch lands unseen,
With many-tinted tangle overgrown,
And ice-bound seas that are like seas of stone.

Those immobile ice-bound seas were more vivid to her than the sea which she had seen and heard in motion at Hastings, on "the pleasant pebbly strand".

In *Seek and Find* there is a passage which throws light upon the moral aspect of her renunciation of Cayley's love, and which suggests that her vigilant scrupulosity sometimes whispered in her ear that her love for him was not compatible with true love for God.

That which we prefer to God is our idol; be it our friend or ourself, a false shame, or a false heroism, or a false fear, whatsoever it be, our idol it is if we obey it rather than God. (See Acts iv. 19; v. 29). . . . We must tolerate indeed neither truce nor compromise with our idols, be they what they may; yet are some idols of their own nature noble, although others are base. Idolatry of self, or of money, or of a bosom sin, is simply base, and must simply be extirpated; to idolise a friend is but to love disproportionately one whom Christ Himself loves far more. In such a case we may pray not to love our friend less but rather to love our God more.

And she reaches the conclusion, not without further spiritual wrestlings and scriptural allusions that, if this orison be made and acted upon,

then all which we deny ourself or another will not be lost but laid up: then if nothing remains which we may lawfully give, at least our prayers can ascend on behalf of the friend who is as our own soul (1 Thess. v. 23 ; Deut. xiii. 6).

Many of the love-poems inspired by Cayley bear the marks of these mental conflicts, and in some of them it is clear that not the least part of her agony was a haunting doubt as to whether she and her lover would meet in another world.

> If I could trust mine own self with your fate
> Shall I not rather trust it in God's hand?

That was all the comfort her prayers brought her, and there were times when it was not enough.

Collinson had found his warmest advocate in Dante Gabriel; Cayley's was William Michael. That pattern to all brothers suggested that if straitened means were an impediment to the marriage between Cayley and Christina they should take up their abode under

his fraternal roof rent free. Her reply to this suggestion was written in pencil, as she "walked along the road with a party", and bears the date "11 September, 1866".

Of course I am not *merely* the happier for what has occurred, but I gain much in knowing how much I am loved beyond my deserts. As to money, I might be selfish enough to wish that were the only bar, but you see from my point of view it is not. Now I am at least unselfish enough altogether to deprecate seeing C. B. C. continually (with nothing but mere feeling to offer) to his hamper and discomfort; but if he likes to see me, God knows I like to see him, and any kindness you show him will only be additional kindness loaded on me.

In the event Cayley continued to see a good deal of her, for a time at the house of William Michael or elsewhere, and later at her mother's house in Torrington Square. She was on friendly terms with his sisters, and it was to his infant nephew, the child of Professor Arthur Cayley of Cambridge, that she dedicated *Sing-Song*. Rather pathetically, in the fifteenth of the *Rosseggiar dell' Oriente* poems she reveals her envy of his womenkind to whom it has been granted to love him

di dritto,
D' amor contento e saggio.

It is probable that Cayley, himself a versifier though hardly a poet, sometimes wrote to Christina otherwise than in prose. If he did, we do not know after what fashion he did it. We know that he wrote her timid, half-formal little notes; that he cut a paragraph about wombats from the *Times* for her; that he assisted her to enlighten Frederic Shields as to the exact meaning of the Hebrew word *Azazel*; that, mindful of her affection for "marine trophies", he once sent her a sea-mouse floating in spirits of wine. It may have been

for her behoof that in 1866 he sat for his portrait wearing a coat of incredibly clumsy cut and a striped waistcoat manifestly made for a man twice as large as himself. Contemplating this photograph and Ford Madox Brown's picture of him as Crabtree in *The Transit of Venus* it is a little difficult to give credence to William Michael's assertion that in his youth Cayley was decidedly good-looking.

Besides the autobiographical *Monna Innominata* sonnets, the Italian sequence, *Il Rosseggiar dell' Oriente*, and certain of the *Later Life* sonnets, Christina wrote numerous poems to Cayley, or about him. Some of the finest of these were not published till after her death, and we have no way of knowing whether she revealed to him those that she hid from the eyes of the world. One cannot help hoping that he was allowed to see the four sonnets "By Way of Remembrance", especially the octet of the fourth. He *did* see the sestet, for it does duty in the tenth sonnet of *Monna Innominata*; but the suppressed octet is of other stuff; *cor ad cor loquitur*.

I love you, and you know it—this at least,
  This comfort is mine own in all my pain;
  You know it, and can never doubt again,
And love's mere self is a continual feast.
No oath of mine or blessing word of priest
  Could make my love more certain or more plain.
O weary moon, still rounding, still decreased!
Life wanes; and when love folds his wings above
  Tired joy and less we feel his conscious pulse,
    Let us go fall asleep, dear friend, in peace;
    A little while, and age and sorrow cease,
  A little while, and love reborn annuls
Life and decay and death, and all is love.

The end came for Charles Bagot Cayley during the night of Christina Rossetti's birthday, December 5,

in the year 1883. It came suddenly, and when she heard that it had come she went round to Somerset House to tell William Michael. "I shall not easily forget the look of her face", he wrote afterwards, "and the strain of self-command in her voice. She did not break down." It would not have been like her to break down. Later she went to Cayley's lodgings, gazed for the last time upon the features from which a quiet death had smoothed the enigmatic smile, and laid white flowers near the hands that would never clasp her hands again.

By his will dated seven months before, Charles Bagot Cayley had left to his "dear and kind friend, Miss Christina Georgiana Rossetti" (the misspelling of her second name was probably characteristic) the remainder of his books published by Longmans, and all sums due upon the sale of such books. He had hinted to her earlier in the year that this was his intention, and in her reply, which begins, "My dear old friend", she had written: "I should value, though I should not need, a memorial. And three of the translations would be very dear: watching over them I might, in a measure, nurse your name and fame. Yet", she adds, with instinctive scrupulosity, "if you think any of your family could feel hurt, do not do it; very likely there was a moment when—and no wonder—those who loved you best thought very severely of me, and indeed I deserved severity at my own hands—I never seemed to get much at yours. And some trifle that you had been fond of, and perhaps had used, would be precious to me."

Such a trifle may have been the ring which, with all her letters to him, was contained in another of his

legacies to her, his "best writing-desk". The demand for his translations of Homer and Petrarch was never very great, but she rejoiced for his memory's sake when an odd copy found a purchaser now and then. She outlived him for eleven years and never ceased to hold him in her heart. When she lay dying she spoke much of him to William Michael, and it may be that a strain of self-reproach was mingled with her thoughts of him during those hours of inaction and recollection. Had she not, as her own generation would have put it, "given him encouragement", only to reject and elude him in the end? Of this she probably said little or nothing, even to William Michael. It is to that faithful brother that we owe the revelation that "One Seaside Grave" does not refer to Dante Gabriel's resting-place at Birchington but to Charles Bagot Cayley's at Hastings. The first of the two muted and sorrowful stanzas bears strong affinity to her earlier work, indeed even to some of her earliest; it is the sudden incoherence of the second, the hushed and irregular cadence, which suggest the o'er-fraught heart that has no longer the flexibility of youth, and is nigh to breaking at last.

Unmindful of the roses,
  Unmindful of the thorn,
A reaper tired reposes
  Among his gathered corn:
  So might I, till the morn!

Cold as the cold Decembers,
  Past as the days that set,
While only one remembers
  And all the rest forget—
  But one remembers yet.

If William Michael was his sister's confidant and comforter, Dante Gabriel was her intellectual workfellow.

When, in 1866, the same year which saw the disregarded emergence of Swinburne's *Songs and Ballads*, Christina published her second volume, *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*, her elder brother took the liveliest interest in the preliminaries, and, as in the case of "Goblin Market", provided a frontispiece and a title-page. His association with the book went further, for it was at his suggestion that the eponymous poem had been expanded from the dirge now forming its conclusion, a dirge written as a self-contained lyric five years before. "The Prince's Progress", originally christened "The Alchemist", formed the subject of a lively correspondence between brother and sister early in 1865, when Christina wisely resisted Dante Gabriel's urging that she should introduce a tournament. "Goblin Market" had startled and charmed by its sumptuous colours, its images, lovely or grotesque, its eager rhythms; here the chief place is filled by a longer, and slower, and more obvious allegory, making no swift address to the senses. Sir Edmund Gosse marvelled that this second parable, whose lesson is "as clear as noon-day", should never have become popular; yet it seems not improbable that it was this very clarity which rebuffed all but the most persevering and serious-minded readers. The underlying motive of "Goblin Market" is half obliterated by the splendour of the fabric; in "The Prince's Progress" we feel instinctively, even a little resentfully, that there is a moral to be drawn and that we shall be constrained to draw it. There is no way of escape here; in "Goblin Market" there are many.

The dirge of 1861 was free from any marked allegorical tinct. Reverting to the broken betrothal

motif, it had a richness, a voluptuous languor, slightly suggestive of Dante Gabriel's hand. The princess has waited in vain for her tardy and capricious prince, and has died on the eve of his coming. He is welcomed by the plangent song of her women, who alternately bewail her death and rebuke his tardiness.

Is she fair as now she lies?
  Once she was fair;
Meet queen for a kingly king
  With gold-dust in her hair;
Now these are poppies in her locks,
  White poppies she must wear;
Must wear a veil to shroud her face
  And the want graven there;
Or is the hunger fed at length,
  Cast off the care?

Having decided, at Dante Gabriel's urging, to expand this threnody into a narrative poem, Christina proceeded to allegorise. She shows us the princess watching, the bridegroom lingering.

"When wilt thou start? Thy bride waits, O youth!"
"Now the moon is full; I tarried for that;
  Now I start in truth."

He is a rather engaging fellow, the Prince, "strong of limb, if of purpose weak"; but when once we perceive that he is really Everyman we feel no surprise at his early encounter with a siren in the form of a milkmaid, who persuades him to dally with her for the whole of a long summer day and night. When he sets forth again the landscape changes and the daisied meadows give place to

A lifeless land, a loveless land,
Without lair or nest on either hand,
Only scorpions jerked in the sand,
  Black as black iron or dusty pale.

It was, as Christina observes, with one of her queer,

humourless lapses into prose, "a tedious land for a social prince". The traveller presses on, and at last halts by a glowing cavern where "an old, old mortal cramped and double" is stirring a cauldron over a livid flame. Here the allegory is a little difficult to follow. The "brew" in the cauldron is an elixir of life lacking only one ingredient. By a grim imaginative touch this ingredient, a dead man's finger, the "old, old mortal" is himself made to provide. The Prince, who has been plying the bellows for him in the hope of some such reward, then fills a phial with the now-potent elixir.

> "One night's rest", thought the Prince, "This done,
> Forth I speed with the rising sun;
> With the morrow I rise and run,
> Come what will of wind or weather.
> This draught of life when my bride is won
> We'll drink together."

This cavern interlude may be intended to typify the innate tendency of poor Everyman to find specious pretexts for his wanderings from the hard and steep path. The Prince rises, but does not run. And his leisurely progress is presently barred by a river in flood. He is swept away by the current and almost drowned, then saved and succoured by four fair ladies slightly reminiscent of King Arthur's five queens.

> Had he stayed to weigh or scan
> He had been more or less than a man.

Being neither, he tarries awhile, and when ultimately he nerves himself to set forth again, he has to scale a mighty mountain.

> Up he went where the goat scarce clings,
> Up where the eagle folds her wings,
> Past the green line of living things,
> Where the sun cannot warm the cold.

And so at last he comes to the palace of his bride, of her who has watched and waited for him while the gold dust darkened on her hair. If he is Everyman who is this golden virgin whom he just fails to win? Truth, maybe, or Righteousness, or Salvation, or the Grace of God. He comes too late, he has tarried too long upon his way.

> Day is over, the day that wore;
> What is this that comes through the door;
> The face covered, the feet before?
> This that coming takes his breath:
> The bride not seen, to be seen no more
> Save of Bridegroom Death.

The dirge "Too late for love, too late for joy" forms the epilogue to this longest of Christina Rossetti's poems. It is not only the longest; it is the one in which she best sustains the heightened imaginative tension from first to last, with a sort of sumptuous simplicity which is one of her most rare endowments. In no other does she use with greater effect those probably unconscious artifices of repetition, anaphora, antithesis, and reiterated cadence which give the characteristic form and movement to her lyrical poems. Every phase of the story, every aspect of every phase, is intensely realised by her, and intimately felt. She herself claimed for it "a certain artistic congruity of structure not lightly to be despised". Yet, somehow, something is lacking. The very element which bears the poet along, the allegorical element, dulls the pleasure and deflects the interest of the reader.

The 1866 volume contained another narrative poem, "Under the Rose", afterwards rechristened "The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children"; it is a poor thing and might well have been allowed to

perish. Nor is there much to praise in "A Royal Princess", first published in an anthology "got up for the relief of distress in the cotton districts". It has energy, emotional impetus, beautiful colour; the last stanza might almost have been written by Mr. Rudyard Kipling in one of the quieter moods of his middle period; but it is deficient in the true Christina quality.

For the rest there is perhaps nothing finer than the finest lyrics in the *Goblin Market* volume, though there are many things here which could ill be spared. "Songs in a Cornfield", "Jessie Cameron", and the "Maiden Song" are good things in their way, though the way is not the highest. One of Christina Rossetti's most enigmatical and haunting utterances is the double poem called "Memory", the first part written in 1857, the second in 1865. The most obvious—but perhaps not the true—solution of the enigma would be that the earlier half was written under the shadow of Collinson and the later under the shadow of Cayley. It was very characteristic of her more mature and awakened love for the blind buzzard that she should

> think how it will be in Paradise
> When we're together.

The broken betrothal *motif* recurs again in "A Bird's Eye View" and yet again in "The Ghost's Petition". It seems also to underlie "Autumn", a poem of 1858 omitted for some occult reason from the 1862 collection. The beauty of "Autumn" is, as such beauty is wont to be, a little hectic and melancholy, but at the end it contracts into a quatrain free from either fever or lassitude, though the last line

My trees are not in flower,
I have no bower,
And gusty creaks my tower,
And lonesome, very lonesome is my strand.

Only in two exquisite little primitive pieces, "Bird or Beast" and "Eve" is a new, fresh, vital note struck. Their manifest affinity is with Blake, though in the case of "Eve" there is something of the almost uncouth but curiously delightful *naïveté* of English devotional verse of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

"While I sit at the door,
Sick to gaze within,
Mine eye weepeth sore
For sorrow and sin:
As a tree my sin stands
To darken all lands;
Death is the fruit it bore."

These might almost be the words of a character in an authentic mystery play.

Miss Alice Boyd, of Penkill Castle, Ayrshire, the appreciative friend first of William Bell Scott and later of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his family, was Christina's hostess during the summer of 1866. At Penkill the room assigned to the shy, dark-haired lady from London looked out upon an old garden and had a little four-cornered window at which that lady used to stand for hours together, "her elbows on the sill, her hands supporting her face", lost in meditation. How she must have looked standing there we may guess from Dante Gabriel's chalk drawing made about this time and used by Mr. Mackenzie Bell as the frontispiece to his monograph. There is a slight change in the features since she sat for *Mary Virgin* and the *Ancilla Domini*, and it is not the kind of change which the mere

passing of a decade and a half might be expected to make. It is not so much an older as a different face. The eyes are now more prominent, the thrust of the chin more emphatic, the curve of the throat less slender and flexible, the droop of the mouth less tender. The wistful look of the earlier Christina has given place to an aspect at once passionate and austere. Here is the image of the woman who wrote:

> My heart goes sighing after swallows flown
> On sometime summer's unreturning track.

CHAPTER V

"SING-SONG"—THE 1875 POEMS

MARGARET POLIDORI died in February 1867. She was a distinctly odd but decidedly engaging old lady, "much addicted"—the phrase is William Michael's —to church-going, and her elder nephew designed the memorial window put up to her in Christ Church, Albany Street. The subject is the Sermon on the Plain. Christina was the model for the kneeling figure in the left foreground, and the half-concealed features of the auburn-maned young man behind her are those of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Shortly after Aunt Margaret's death, Mrs. Rossetti, her two daughters, and her younger son moved from their old quarters in Albany Street to a larger, self-contained house in Euston Square, afterwards known as 5 Endsleigh Gardens, and now swept away.

Slowly Christina was making her way as a writer of verse. With every passing year the atmosphere became more favourable to her particular type of genius. The Oxford Movement and the Pre-Raphaelite movement, separated from each other by only a decade, were now, after an interval of years, among the things that had been, but their results, recognised and unrecognised, pervaded the religious and artistic life of England.

The world was ready for Christina Rossetti; compilers of anthologies were already on her track; and in 1868 Mr. Gladstone was heard to repeat the "Maiden Song" by heart "in a mixed company".

During the winter of 1870–71 a friend of Dante Gabriel's and of Swinburne's entered the circle of the Rossetti ladies. He was Edmund Gosse, then "baking palely, like a muffin", in the library of the British Museum. Most fortunately the word-portrait of Christina which he wrote at her brother's suggestion in 1881 was enriched with a reminiscential epilogue when it was republished in *Critical Kit-Kats*. Writing of her as he remembered her in the early 'seventies, he says:

> I think that tasteful arrangement of dress might have made her appear a noble and even a romantic figure . . . but, as I suppose, an ascetic or almost methodistical reserve caused her to clothe herself in a style, or with an absence of style, which was really distressing; her dark hair was streaked across her olive forehead and turned up in a chignon; the high stiff dress ended in a hard collar and plain brooch; the extraordinarily ordinary skirt sank over a belated crinoline, and these were inflictions hard to bear from the high priestess of Pre-Raphaelitism.

Young Mr. Gosse bore them cheerfully, however, for the sake of those moments when her heart "seemed to open like an unsealed fountain" as they talked on "real subjects" together. This happy friendship was practically terminated, as far as personal contact went, in the early summer of 1871 when the sudden onset of Graves' disease laid Christina low. Two years later he encountered her at the British Museum, and she was then so disfigured as to be hardly recognisable.

From time to time Christina Rossetti's health had

caused her family a certain amount of perturbation. Phthisis had been suspected in her early 'twenties, and it is possible that the poem "For a Mercy Received", though its categorical allusions are to "labour, failure, shame", may have marked her deliverance from this dread. The last but one, and the worst but one, of her physical afflictions was the intractable and obscure condition known as exophthalmic bronchocele or Graves' disease, caused by hypersecretion of the thyroid gland. Sir William Jenner was at once invoked. Christina liked him. Her sensitive spirit recoiled from doctors who "looked surprised" when she described her symptoms. Jenner never looked surprised. From a professional point of view her case was interesting to him, though the state of medical knowledge at the time did not enable him to do much to relieve her sufferings, the unnatural protrusion of the eyeballs, the high blood pressure, the recurrent sensation of asphyxia. During the second half of 1871 and the greater part of 1872 the shadow lay heavy upon her, but by the beginning of 1873 the more distressing outward manifestations were subsiding, and it seemed as if the disease had spent its force. Its stigmata remained upon her, body and soul, till her death, but it never returned. The dignity, the reticence, the fortitude with which Christina Rossetti bore her grievous cross become clear if we look for definite allusions to it in her verse. There is almost none. Indirect allusions are not hard to find; perhaps the first two lines of the last *Monna Innominata* sonnet may be accounted one. But she does not fall by the wayside, she does not whine. She can even joke gently in her letters to William Michael about her "fearful brownness", and about

being "less ornamental than society may justly demand". By the end of 1872 her poetical pulses had begun to beat again.

Between January 1871, when the Franco-Prussian war inspired her to write two very fine "topical" poems, and October 1872, when a manuscript sent to her by Cayley drew forth the "Venus's Looking Glass" sonnet, there seems to be an almost total blank as regards verse. Nor is it certain that either of the prose books published in 1874, *Annus Domini* and *Speaking Likenesses*, was even roughed out during this period of enforced seclusion. Curiously enough, it was during that most dolorous stage of her existence that there was published the most light-hearted of all her works, the cycle of child poems called *Sing-Song*. With pen-and-ink sketches by Arthur Hughes it appeared towards the end of 1871.

In our own time the vogue for what one might call books of the *Lyra Innocentium* type has become very great. In these books the authors strive, with varying degrees of success, to look at the world from the level of a child's eyes. To think and speak as if one's head were hardly higher than a table-top is more difficult than those who have never tried to do it realise. Mature knees are apt to creak, and it is only by kneeling that most grown-ups can bring their heads low enough. Christina was not uniformly successful. There are moments when melancholy breaks in, when the impulse to improve the occasion is too strong to be resisted. But when she does succeed, she is incomparable.

In its final form *Sing-Song* consists of a hundred and twenty-six miniature lyrics, some of them mere couplets, riddles, or quatrains. The sub-title, *A*

Nursery Rhyme Book, is justified by many of the shorter poems, if not by all. The essence of the true nursery rhyme, like the essence of the true ballad, is that it should seem as if no single person could possibly have thought of it and written it down. This condition is fulfilled in "Mix a Pancake", "Your Brother has a Falcon", and "Ferry Me across the Water", in "If I were a Queen" and "Bread and Milk for Breakfast"; but some of the loveliest of the little songs, such as "What are Heavy? Sea-sand and Sorrow", "Is the Moon Tired?" "Good-bye in Fear, Good-bye in Sorrow", are self-conscious, sophisticated, neither childish nor likely to be understood by a child. The metrical range of *Sing-Song* is remarkable. Here are rhythms as unearthly as those of Blake, jingles as gay as those crooned by the nameless nurses of the Middle Ages from whom the authentic nursery-rhymes derive; elisions and redundant syllables are placed with a touch at once subtle and courageous. The poet gives and withholds the alms of imagery with an unerring hand. The excellence of even Christina Rossetti's weakest songs in this kind will be realised if we contrast, for example, "Dancing on the Hill-tops" with Tennyson's "Minnie and Winnie". As for the purely nonsensical things, such as "If a Mouse could Fly" and "When Fishes set Umbrellas up", they have the inconsequence, the irresponsibility, and the happy abandon lacking which nonsense is heavy stuff indeed.

It is always perilous to cast about for influences and affinities when studying Christina's finest work. Blake is the obvious begetter of the daisy song, yet we have her brother's word for it that it would be an error to suppose that at any time she "read Blake much or

constantly". The song itself is a curiously charming quatrain:

> Where innocent, bright-eyed daisies are,
> With blades of grass between,
> Each daisy stands up like a star
> Out of a sea of green.

It would probably be an even greater error to suppose that at any time Christina read Watts much or Herrick constantly; yet they, too, might be regarded as her spiritual forefathers.

One of the strangest of Christina Rossetti's misapprehensions concerning herself was the idea that she was not fitted temperamentally either to understand small children or to be understood by them. "I know myself", she wrote once, "to be deficient in the nice motherly ways which win, and ought to win, a child's heart." When she visited the Gilchrists in 1863 she played ball with the little daughter of the house, but seems to have been more interested in "cold little frogs and clammy toads" which she held in her hands "with a fearless love" that left the infant Gilchrists gasping. William Michael thinks that in early youth she was "certainly not fond of children", and hints that in later years "their pretty or quaint ways" amused her as the ways of pet animals might have done. There is no trace anywhere in her poems of any regret that motherhood as well as marriage had been denied to her. Yet Swinburne himself never dedicated to one of the tiny objects of his adoration a song more exquisitely vivid and ardent than—

> My baby has a mottled fist,
> My baby has a neck in creases,
> My baby kisses and is kissed,
> For he's the very thing for kisses.

Sing-Song was only Christina's third published volume of lyrics, but the *Athenæum* in reviewing it said boldly that she had written some of the sweetest verse of her time. It was a remarkable vintage season for nonsense, and in the *Academy* of January 15, 1872, Sidney Colvin reviewed at one fell swoop *Sing-Song*, *Through the Looking Glass*, and Edward Lear's *More Nonsense*. Of *Sing-Song*, which he deals with first, Colvin says that the book is "one of the most exquisite of its class ever seen". He mentions Blake, but with no suggestion that Blake's influence has been a determining factor, and declares that "in turning the simplest fancies or hints of fragmentary idea Miss Rossetti cannot lose the habit or instinct of an artist".

Among Christina's most engaging traits was her enthusiastic appreciation of the works of those whom she loved. It was with more than common earnestness that in her last years she commended to her first biographer, Mr. Mackenzie Bell, Maria Francesca's book, *In the Shadow of Dante*, published a little before *Sing-Song*. Good critics have found good things to say of this modest volume. It seems unlikely that it will ever be resuscitated, coloured, and moulded as it is by the mind of Maria Francesca herself, the mind of a clever, accomplished woman, but one whose orthodoxy was so rigid that it would not permit her to go and look at the mummies in the British Museum lest the general resurrection should occur while she was in the act. Her strength of mind was great in many ways. She bore philosophically the extinction of a brief friendship with John Ruskin, "on the ground that such mere tastes and glimpses of congenial intercourse on earth wait for their development in Heaven". And in 1873

she took what was then the drastic step of entering an Anglican sisterhood. Beyond doubt she there found her appointed niche, though she lived to fill it for three years only. And in the interval two other and much more disturbing events were making their repercussions felt in the Rossetti family: Dante Gabriel had collapsed, physically and mentally, and William Michael was falling in love with Lucy Madox Brown.

Neither the exhumation of the still pitifully beautiful dead body of Elizabeth Siddal Rossetti and the retrieval of the manuscripts buried with her, nor the "Fleshly School" duel between Dante Gabriel and Robert Buchanan would appear to have left any trace on the letters, the prose, or the poems of Christina. Her natural reticence, her realisation of the very imperfect sympathy between herself and that "fäery's child" her sister-in-law, may have sealed her lips upon the first episode; the second occurred when she was too ill to be fully conscious of it. Mrs. Rossetti's burden of anxiety was grievous to be borne in 1872, when her daughter Christina's plight was still woeful and her elder son was besotted with self-administered chloral. A year, later, however, the clouds had begun to disperse. Thanks to the wise care of Dr. Hake and the interval of ordered tranquillity in the poetical doctor's house at Roehampton, Dante Gabriel was able to pull himself together, and by that time his younger sister was sufficiently recovered to join him at Kelmscott.

Thereafter we find that Kelmscott is "dear Kelmscott" and Janey Morris "dear Mrs. Morris" in Christina's published letters; but her actual impressions of the house and its inhabitants, if ever they were recorded, have been withheld from us. One of her

fellow-guests was Theodore Watts-Dunton, and the encounter was doubly fortunate; it enabled her to 'place' manuscripts in the *Athenæum* through his good offices, and gave him the wherewithal for those sympathetic studies lacking which our knowledge of her would be even more patchy and imperfect than it is.

Watts-Dunton has left it on record that when they were all three at Kelmscott nothing would make Dante Gabriel more surprised than "to see Christina and myself lingering over a patch of those lovely, many-coloured mosses upon the old apple trees in the garden". She probably lingered because her companion lingered; such minutiæ seldom stirred her to enthusiasm. When, at a later date, the same excellent friend persuaded her to get up and watch the sunrise with him, he had to confess that Christina was "not much interested at first", though he consoled himself with the recollection that she afterwards agreed that "a sunrise surpassed a sunset and was worth getting up to see". Her own liveliest recollection, if we may judge from an allusion in *Time Flies*, was that she had got up so early that the sun seemed a laggard.

When the engagement between William Michael and Lucy Madox Brown was formally announced, Christina was actually at Kelmscott. At first the news was received with pleasure. "Her sweetness, amiability and talent", wrote Christina to the fortunate fiancé, "make her a grace and an honour to us." The strain imposed upon the friendship between his sister and his sister-in-law by their almost continual residence under one roof between 1874 and 1876 was, however, sometimes rather greater than either lady could bear. Christina was always affectionate with Lucy, self-

effacing, courteous, considerate, scrupulously fair; but she could not fail to be conscious that her presence in what was now Lucy's house must become irksome. The two remaining Polidori aunts were established at 12 Bloomsbury Square, and thither Mrs. Rossetti and Christina would betake themselves from time to time. Brief visits to various places—Bognor, Clifton, Eastbourne—also eased the tension between Lucy and her "in-laws". To be near Maria, the Rossetti ladies stayed at All Saints' Hospital, Eastbourne, and Christina wrote thence in 1876: "I am exercising my old craft of painting despicable sprigs on note-paper corners for sale at 1d. per sheet—for the good of the house". This would appear to be the remark which Mr. de la Mare interprets as meaning that "when money was scanty" she had exercised this same craft "for the good of the house"—of Rossetti; and it is possible that she did. Before the year ended Maria Francesca was no more, and Mrs. Rossetti and her remaining daughter had moved into a house of their own at 30 Torrington Square. "I hope", wrote Christina to Lucy, "when two roofs shelter us and when faults which I regret are no longer your daily trial that we may regain some of that liking which we had as friends, and which I should wish to be only more tender and warm now we are sisters. Don't, please, despair of my doing better." At this distance of time, and from a view-point far outside the Rossetti circle, one may apportion sympathy pretty equally between these two. Lucy was young; she had a will of her own; she had opinions of her own, quite uncoloured by her early education at the hands of Mrs. Rossetti. She was as much a sceptic as her husband, and of

their babies the only one to receive the rite of Christian baptism received it from Christina herself, at her earnest prayer, when it was obvious that death was near. To paraphrase "The Prince's Progress", Lucy would have been "more or less than a woman" if she had not felt at times that William Michael might be a little more satisfactory as a husband if he were a little less admirable as a brother and as a son.

It is hardly surprising that one of Christina Rossetti's favourite texts should have been Proverbs xvii. 17. For twenty-two years she was "substantially dependent" on William Michael. Despite her literary successes, her financial position improved only by degrees, and as late as 1887 she was pleasantly astonished to find that her "takings" amounted to £300 in one year. The deaths of her mother and aunts had made her comparatively comfortable by the time that her own hour struck, and she was then able, after setting aside £2000 for charitable purposes, to repay with some modest accretion of interest the actual sums expended by her brother on her support; but in 1876 it was only by pooling their resources that the Rossetti ladies and the two Polidori aunts were able to live in Torrington Square "on the quiet scale which they affected".

The new edition of Christina Rossetti's poems which appeared in 1875 contained some fresh material of great interest. Dante Gabriel was, *more suo*, prompt both with praise and with censure. Writing from Bognor, he says:

> Some of the matter newly added is most valuable. "Amor Mundi" is one of the choicest masterpieces: the "Venus" sonnet and the one following most exquisite:

"Confluents" lovely, and penetrating in its cadence: and the two poems on the Franco-Prussian war very noble—particularly the second, which is, I dare say, the best thing said in verse on the subject. The first seems to me just a little echoish of the Barrett-Browning style. . . . A real taint, to some extent, of modern vicious style derived from the same source—what might be called a falsetto muscularity—always seemed to me much too prominent in the long piece called "The Lowest Room". This I think is now included for the first time, and I am sorry for it.

Christina received these fraternal admonitions in a becoming spirit of meekness, though without hauling down her flag. "The whole subject of youthful poems grows anxious in middle age, or may at some moments appear so," she wrote in reply, "one is so different and yet so vividly the same. I am truly sorry if I have judged amiss in including 'The Lowest Room', which, however, I remind you had already seen light in *Mac's Mag.*" It is a little curious that Dante Gabriel, while praising "Amor Mundi", the "Venus" sonnet, and the one following (which was "Love Lies Bleeding") should have said nothing about "Sunset to Star Rise". The three poems singled out all have the same high emotional tension, the same exuberance of colour, the same almost hectic pulse and pace as "The World", "The Three Nuns", and "The Convent Threshold", and it was when writing in this slightly artificial vein that Christina came nearest to achieving objectivity. "Sunset to Star Rise", though in a sense it belongs to the same group, has, apart from its intrinsic charm, a peculiar personal interest. On the manuscript William Michael found a pencilled note, "House of Charity". This house was an institution at Highgate devoted to the reclamation

of Magdalens, and there Christina was wont for some years to make occasional sojourns, "taking part in the work". The poet of "Divine and Human Pleading" may have had a particular vein of compassion for these daughters of Magdala, and indeed the hundred and forty-first prayer in *Annus Domini* goes far to prove that she had. At all events she became an associate of the Anglican Sisterhood at Highgate and, as Mrs. Bell Scott recorded in 1860, wore their characteristic dress, which "was quite becoming to her with the veil". From the pencilled note William Michael surmised that his sister may have meant the sonnet "Sunset to Star Rise" to represent the utterance of one of the women whom the sisterhood existed to befriend, "yet", he adds, "one hesitates to think so". One does indeed. This sonnet is unmistakably Christina's own, intimate and self-revelatory, the authentic outcome of those spiritual stresses which made her say, as she does here:

> . . . I have hedged me with a thorny hedge,
> I live alone, I look to die alone.

It is rather upon "Amor Mundi", written only one day before "Sunset to Star Rise", that the shadow of the House of Charity seems to lie. Not to Christina, not to any *vergine sorella*, does the lover speak in the opening lines:

> Oh, where are you going, with your love-locks flowing,
> On the west wind blowing along the valley track?

The recklessness of the rhythm, the throb of the weak rhymes, play their part in producing the effect at once voluptuous and *macabre* which the poem makes upon the imagination:

"Oh, what is that glides quickly where the velvet flowers
grow thickly,
Their scent comes rich and sickly?"—
"A scaled and hooded worm!"
"Oh, what's that in the hollow, so pale I quake to follow?"
"Oh, that's a thin dead body which waits the eternal term."

The third poem in Dante Gabriel's group of favourites is the cryptic sonnet, "Love Lies Bleeding", written when Christina was still disfigured by her sore disease, when Collinson had vanished from the landscape of her life, and when Cayley, though rejected as a lover, was quietly enrooted as a friend. It begins:

Love, that is dead and buried, yesterday
Out of his grave rose up before my face;
No recognition in his look, no trace
Of memory in his eyes dust-dimmed and grey.

This poem may be as impersonal as the Zaras and Evas of the little Polidori garnering of thirty years before, but it has a quality which is seldom found in Christina's admittedly fictitious utterances.

She herself, says William Michael, "associated this sonnet with 'Venus's Looking Glass'". The history of both is curious. Cayley had sent her a short poem in manuscript called "The Birth of Venus", and a little later a shorter still, on the same theme. "The longer of these two poems", Christina herself records, "was sent me first. Then I wrote one which the second rebuts. At last I wound up by my sonnet, 'Venus's Looking Glass'." As Cayley's manuscripts remain in the breast of Chaos and old night, it is impossible to conjecture what the link between his verses and her sonnets can have been. If her first poem was rebutted by his second, it may be that there is some personal tincture in "Love Lies Bleeding", un-

likely though it seems on the face of it. Our difficulties become greater when we turn to the "Venus" sonnet, for it is a piece of pure paganism, as lusciously lovely as Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, or the masque in *The Tempest*, or the lyrics in *Endymion*. The final quatrain is especially reminiscent of Keats, and not at his least admirable:

> But when flushed autumn through the woodlands went
> I spied sweet Venus walk amid the wheat;
> Whom seeing every harvester gave o'er
> His toil, and laught, and hoped, and was content.

"Confluents", the fourth poem singled out by Dante Gabriel, has a curious and to some ears almost intolerable "minikin" couplet at the end of each stanza, repeating the terminals of the couplet preceding it. Her brother was probably better inspired when he commended the two poems on the Franco-Prussian war. Christina did not often touch on topical themes, and when she did the result was not always happy—as witness "Our Widowed Queen" and "The Death of a First Born". Temperamentally she was as little fitted to be a "special occasion" poet as Jane Austen was to write an historical novel glorifying the House of Coburg. Here, however, there was a stimulus sufficiently powerful to carry her beyond the wonted frontiers of her mind. Normally she cared little for politics. In her youth no daily paper had brought the clash and colour of the busy world into the Charlotte Street house, whose denizens derived their knowledge of current affairs from *Bell's Weekly Advertiser*. It may be true, as Mr. Walter de la Mare says, that the second of the Franco-Prussian poems, "To-day for Me", "would, as a work of art, be no less human,

beautiful, and significant even if France had been a country of her imagination and the Franco-Prussian war a mere fiction", but it is also true that she obeyed a natural instinct to range herself on the side of a Latin people whose literary and artistic heritage was familiar and congenial to her. As she herself noted, the "two pieces . . . aim at expressing human sympathy, not political bias". Mr. de la Mare seems to agree with Dante Gabriel that "To-day for Me" has a rarer quality than the preceding poem, "Thy Brother's Blood Crieth". There is something almost sibylline about them both, and the last stanza of the second sounds like the cry of a Cassandra:

> A time there is for change and chance,
> Who next shall drink the trembling cup,
> Wring out its dregs and suck them up
> After France?

The original title of "The Lowest Room" was "A Fight over the Body of Homer". It was written in September 1856, and consists of a dialogue between two sisters, the elder being the narrator, and the younger a Tennysonian figure with golden ringlets and "a white embroidering hand". These sisters are not the Rossetti sisters, though she whose hair "showed the first tinge of grey" may have been a mouthpiece for some of Christina's sentiments about this time. She has been reading Homer—presumably not in the original—and she is weary of the drabness and monotony of nineteenth-century England.

> He stirs my sluggish pulse like wine,
> He melts me like the wind of spice,
> Strong as strong Ajax' red right hand
> And grand like Juno's eyes.

The golden-haired sister dissents. She smilingly combats the arguments of her companion, and even waxes eloquent in her exaltation of her own days above the days of "Old Homer". Her stout defence of modernity seems all the more remarkable since

> Mild she was, of few soft words,
> Most gentle, easy to be led,
> Content to listen when I spoke
> And reverence what I said;

in short, an ideal younger sister, as amenable to her elder as Christina was to Maria Francesca, but much more even-tempered and obviously much less intelligent than either of the Rossetti ladies. Dante Gabriel was right in deploring Christina's tendency to borrow cadences from Tennyson; if he perceived that she occasionally paid *him* the same compliment, he could not find it in his heart to chide. She followed her brother at his best, and Tennyson at his weakest. What was there in the form and moving of *The Talking Oak* that she should thus imitate them?

> A little graver than her wont
> Because her words had fretted me;
> Not warbling quite her merriest tune
> Birdlike from tree to tree.

It is all but parody. And she shows unusual clumsiness in fitting the odd corners of dialogue into the framework of the stanza, she who in "The Round Tower at Jhansi" had achieved a masterpiece of swift, tense speech, she whose monologues are so full of unforced accord and gracious as the inflections of a beautiful living voice. The influence of Tennyson could hardly fail to be potent in the Rossetti group towards the end of 1856. At that period several of

the members of the disrupted P.R.B. were making drawings for the illustrated edition of the Laureate's shorter poems published in the ensuing year by Moxon of Dover Street. Woolner was responsible for the medallion frontispiece; Millais, Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel each had more than one finger in the pie. There is a distinct suggestion of Christina's features in those of the first Queen from the left in her brother's picture illustrating the lines in "The Palace of Art" about "mythic Uther's deeply wounded son", and we have William Michael's testimony that the profile on the extreme right is "a very faithful likeness" of her.

Among the other new material in the 1875 edition were "By the Sea", "Days of Vanity", "Enrica", "Autumn Violets", "A Dirge", "A Green Cornfield", "Dead Hope", "On the Wing", "Bird Raptures", and several devotional pieces of unequal excellence. "Enrica" is interesting as being an attempt at a word picture of the vivacious Italian lady, Signora Enrica Barile-Filopanti, who hurled an extemporised oration at Garibaldi when he was on his way through the cheering London crowd in 1864, and also as showing that in temper and deportment the daughter of Gabriele Rossetti and granddaughter of Gaetano Polidori regarded herself as essentially and typically English. She was by this time not so much English as British, British in her seriousness, her decorum, her lack of taste in externals, her compassion for the weak and suffering, her distrust of the Woman's Rights movement, her vague, instinctive Toryism. She was even British (of her period) in her anxiety to eliminate from her later collected editions any poems that might conceivably be misinterpreted to the confusion of the

reader. And from 1877 onward she wore a lace cap indoors.

In the *Goblin Market* volume there were several lyrics which she afterwards dropped quietly overboard, "A Triad", "Cousin Kate", and "Sister Maude" among them. "Light Love" was admitted in 1866 and excluded in 1875. In the case of "A Triad" her second thoughts are comprehensible. Were it not that the third singer in the group is described as "blue with famine after love", the sonnet might be illustrated by Palma Vecchio's picture of the three Venetian Courtesans, "flushed to the yellow hair and finger-tips". "Light Love" is certainly not edifying in the Victorian sense, but it represents an honest attempt at psychological interpretation. In only seven verses we see the mood of the lover pass from tenderness mixed with compunctious visitings to scornful satiety, and thence to bitter, self-condemning wrath when he abandons his "mateless dove" for the bride who "leans but from a guarded tree". "Cousin Kate" is another story of a "mateless dove", a story told with that dreadful fluency and facility which put Christina at times on the same technical level as Adelaide Procter. "Sister Maude" is in a different category. William Michael suggests that it bears some affinity to "Tennyson's composition 'The Sisters' "; yet the story of a secret love-tryst betrayed by a jealous sister has been retold by numberless ballad-singers, and nameless blind and aged crowders, never better than in the Scottish version known as "Binnorie". This story seems to have had a strange charm for Christina Rossetti towards 1860, when both "Sister Maude" and "Noble Sisters" were written. That "Noble Sisters" is the better poem of the two

may or may not have been the reason for its retention when the other was rejected. In both she has adopted the stumbling, rushing ballad-rhythm which she had learned from Dante Gabriel without learning to use it to such good purpose as he.

> My father may sleep in Paradise,
> My Mother at heaven-gate,
> But sister Maude shall get no sleep
> Either early or late.

The Tennysonian tinct is fainter here, and in none of her later poems, lyrical or narrative, is it either insistent or irritating. She seemed to move away from him, and, though more irresolutely, from Dante Gabriel and the Pre-Raphaelites as well. At one time only the flimsiest hazard prevented her from meeting the Laureate. Her brothers were both more fortunate, particularly William Michael, who visited Farringford in 1858. Tennyson then talked of many things, but as Christina's poems had not yet been collected and published in book form he was probably unaware that his visitor had a sister who wrote verse.

CHAPTER VI

"A PAGEANT AND OTHER POEMS"

DURING the summer of 1877 Mrs. Rossetti and Christina joined "poor dear Gabriel" in his farmhouse retreat near Herne Bay. Neither the reduction in the daily dose of chloral, nor the nocturnal administration of buttermilk, recommended as a cure for insomnia by that most ardent and quixotic of friends, Frederic Shields, availed to lift him out of the physical and mental morass into which he was sinking. And yet it was at this season that he roused himself sufficiently to make in tinted crayons the drawing of his mother and sister now in the National Portrait Gallery. Frances Rossetti had then lost little, if anything, of her serene comeliness. Time had dealt gently with her, altering yet not obliterating her beauty. It was otherwise with Christina. Spiritual conflict, hopes belied, bodily ills grievous to bear, had made of her face a dusky, inscrutable mask. The protuberance of the eyes adds to this effect of an exotic image. The droop of the mouth, wistful in *Mary Virgin*, has become a curve of bitter self-repression.

The almost continual grind of anxiety notwithstanding, Christina's spirits seem to have brightened a little during the years immediately preceding Dante

Gabriel's death. She was pleasantly diverted when her precocious little niece Olivia, in conversation with Mr. Boyle of the *Daily Chronicle*, referred to that journal as the *Daily Crocodile*, and writing to her elder brother from Eastbourne in the summer of 1881 she said, "The horrors of this place would certainly overwhelm you—its idlers, brass bands, and nigger minstrels of British breed, and other attractions; but I, more frivolous, am in a degree amused." That last phrase is most characteristic, and tells us much. Despite the doubts still felt by some of her sincerest admirers, Christina was often quite capable of being amused "in a degree". Amusement with her seems never to have been absolute. As middle age crept on she made deliberate and conscientious efforts to cultivate what she recognised to be the Christian virtue of cheerfulness, and Mrs. Katherine Tynan Hinkson represents her as assuming a deportment and manner of approach that can only be described as breezy; but she was not a person of strong humorous perceptions, and we have her brother's evidence that "Sir Toby Belch and Falconbridge would simply repel her, and even Falstaff would find little indulgence, and elicit only watery smiles".

During these years — 1881–83 — Christina Rossetti's friendship with Charles Bagot Cayley continued in full force. The sea-mouse which he sent her in spirits of wine, "not without fears" for the contents of his carpet-bag, drew from her a fanciful, slender lyric, and, with its colours undimmed, remained among her most cherished "marine trophies" till the very last. There is no evidence in her published correspondence as to whether she was acquainted

with the volume of verse, *Psyche's Interludes*, which Cayley brought out in 1857, but it would be difficult to believe that these amateurish productions marred by occasional lapses into bad taste could have made a strong appeal to her. Almost certainly she would disapprove of "The Quintessence of Aurora", a clumsy parody of Mrs. Browning's style; nor can we imagine her finding any pleasure in the voluptuousness of the lines on Leda, or being amused, even "in a degree", by the would-be funny stanzas on Hypatia, an unlikely theme for jocularity, though the actual butt was, of course, Kingsley. There may have been other and finer qualities in the collection privately printed by Cayley himself about twenty-three years after *Psyche's Interludes* had died at birth. One of these later poems expressed "the emotion of a Moslem woman severed from her Christian lover," and Christina, charmed by the metrical structure and prompt to perceive the analogy of the case with her own and Caley's, wrote "Parted"—and hid the manuscript away in her desk.

It is curious that Miss Rossetti, so impervious to most external influences, should have reacted thus eagerly to the touch of an imagination, if not of an intellect, so much inferior to her own. She borrowed the title of "Luscious and Sorrowful" from a phrase in a lyric of Caley's which had appeared in the *Nation*, and reverted to it in the eleventh of the *Rosseggiar dell' Oriente* poems; and, as has been seen, three of the sonnets in the 1875 edition were directly evoked by him. Perhaps when she summed up, in silence and solitude, the various aspects of her renunciation she may have counted among the things which might have

been and could never be some such poetical yoking-together as that which united the Brownings: not collaboration, nor even interplay of thought and fancy, but something more subtle and satisfying than either —the full and absolute accord of poet's mind with poet's mind. If so, she was the more deceived.

Mild surmise was occasioned among the Rossettis in July 1880 when a new and short-lived periodical called *The Pen* published an article on Dante Gabriel, in the course of which the anonymous writer—it was really Mrs. Meynell—observed that "Miss Christina Rossetti, the quaint, the spiritual, and gently emotional poetess is probably even more popular than he". Five years later, when Mrs. Katherine Tynan Hinkson was invited to the shabby, tenebrous house in Torrington Square, she records that "the Meynells envied me . . . saying, 'You will have the privilege of seeing a Saint'"; but Alice Meynell and Christina Rossetti never met.

New friends continued to swim into Christina's ken through Dante Gabriel as long as her brother lived. Mr. (later Sir) Hall Caine's lecture on Rossetti's poems reached her and her mother at Seaford during the summer of 1879 and charmed them both. "If you come to know him," Christina wrote, "I should like to know what he is like; conflicting images of him evolve themselves from my inner consciousness, and he cannot be like both." In due course Dante Gabriel *did* "come to know him", and his sister was able to decide which, if either, of "the conflicting images" approximated to the truth. Towards the end of the same year she was "hugging hopes of getting together before long enough verse for a *small* fresh volume". These hopes materialised in 1881, when Macmillan,

"the staunch Mac" as she affectionately called him, published *A Pageant and Other Poems*. It was the last book of hers which Dante Gabriel welcomed in this world. Hall Caine reviewed it in *The Academy*, Watts-Dunton in the *Athenæum*; and Swinburne's "delight with the 'Pageant' amounted to . . . ecstasy". (The ellipsis is William Michael's.) Dante Gabriel himself wrote to Christina that he and Watts-Dunton were "both deeply impressed by the beauty of the *Monna Innominata* series", and added, "I think the 'Ballad of Boding' grimmish on the whole". He did not fail to point out the affinities between this Ballad and "Sleep at Sea". The affinities certainly exist, but they neither pervade nor obtrude, and Christina's own hope that "the diversity is sufficient to justify a 'B of B' " is well founded.

In both these poems, as also in the posthumous "Moonshine", she uses the image of a sea-journey as an allegory of human life. There is a peculiar hush and pallor about "Sleep at Sea". The cadence has an onomatopœic quality rare in her more serious verse, and it is strange that this shy, self-centred, devout woman, who had never even crossed the Channel[1] when the poem was written, should have had so strong an instinctive perception of the rhythms of the sea, and of the swing and thrust of a sailing vessel.

Driving and driving
The ship drives amain,
While swift from mast to mast
Shapes flit again,

[1] She left England for the first time in 1861, when with her mother and William Michael she visited Paris, Rouen, Coutances, and Jersey. Her second and last continental journey was the Italian trip of 1865.

Flit silent as the silence
Where men lie slain;
Their shadow cast upon the sails
Is like a stain.

There is no progressive action, only the vision, which might have been conceived by de Quincey, of the drifting ship, the drowsing crew, the agonised spirits flitting from mast to mast. In "A Ballad of Boding" the imagery is vivid to gorgeousness, the rhythm irregular, passionate, flexible; there is a consecutive order of events, if not precisely a plot, and the fable has the effect rather of a morality play than of a homily. Not even in "Goblin Market" are there more magnificent splashes of colour than the "manifold adorning" of the two doomed ships, with their scarlet trumpeters and their sails "like glittering wire". The ships of the vision are three, and it is the third, the dolorous vessel of sackcloth sails, laden with "earth gone dust and brown" which wins safely to harbour, after her golden sisters have been smitten and shattered by a sea-monster. Though this vague evil recalls the ἄγριον τέρας sent by Poseidon to affright the sweating team of Hippolytus it is improbable that the inspiration was drawn from Euripides. Cayley had not translated him, Christina had no Greek, Professor Gilbert Murray's rhymed versions as yet were not. Milton himself may count for little in the genesis of that satanic apparition, for Christina wrote some years later in an unpublished letter to Sir Wyndham Dunstan: "Milton I cannot warm towards, even let alone all theological questions". In the same letter she confesses to having been "quite disappointed" with the *Opium Eater* when she first read it. These things are mysteries, for no reader acquainted with all three

writers could approach "Sleep at Sea" without thinking of *Dream Fugue*, or "A Ballad of Boding" without some remembrance of *Paradise Lost*. No part of the "Ballad" is more heightened by the strange energy that sometimes informed the singer than the long passage describing the sea-horror.

> Soon I spied a something dim,
> Many-handed, grim,
> That went flitting to and fro the first and second ship.
> . . . . . .
> With a horny hand it steered,
> And a horn appeared
> On its sneering head upreared
> Haughty and high
> Against the blackening, lowering sky.
> With a hoof it swayed the waves;
> They opened here and there,
> Till I spied deep open graves
> Full of skeletons
> That were men and women once
> Foul or fair;
> Full of things that creep
> And fester in the deep
> And never breathe the clean, life-nurturing air.

The obvious affinity is with Coleridge rather than with Milton. Form, colour, and cadence all catch something of their eerie beauty from the *Ancient Mariner*, and the "thing accurst" is realised with a shuddering perception not unlike the Mariner's when he "looked upon the rotting sea" and could bear to look no more. It was no common achievement on Christina Rossetti's part thus to produce a poem which should so closely resemble another and a greater, and yet remain in itself great and inalienably her own.

In addition to the *Monna Innominata* and *Later Life* sonnets, the *Pageant* volume contained between fifty and sixty poems, good and—if not precisely bad

—a little less than good. The first, "A Key Note" is supposed to give the pitch of them all, but the dedicatory sonnet to Frances Rossetti rings with a truer sound:

> Sonnets are full of love, and this my tome
> Has many sonnets; so here now shall be
> One sonnet more, a love sonnet, from me
> To her whose heart is my heart's quiet home,
> To my first Love, my Mother, on whose knee
> I learnt love-lore that is not troublesome;
> Whose service is my special dignity,
> And she my lodestar while I go and come.
> And so because you love me, and because
> I love you, Mother, I have woven a wreath
> Of rhymes wherewith to crown your honoured name;
> In you not fourscore years can dim the flame
> Of love, whose blessed glow transcends the laws
> Of time and change and mortal life and death.

The poet herself was particularly delighted at the warm welcome given to the *Pageant*. "I fancy it", she wrote to Dante Gabriel, "among the best and most wholesome things I have produced, and I have had a quiet grin over October's remark, which ushers in November, as connecting it with my own brothers and myself. Pray appreciate the portrait!" "October's remark" is:

> Here comes my youngest sister looking grim
> And dim
> With dismal ways,

and it inspires regret that Dante Gabriel's reply should have been so severely mutilated by his brother and editor. It may be that he made some allusion to November's own lines as completing the portrait.

> Nought have I to bring,
> Tramping a-chill and shivering,
> Except these pine-cones for a blaze,—
> Except a fog which follows,
> And stuffs up all the hollows,—

Except a hoar-frost here and there,—
Except some shooting stars
Which dart their luminous cars
Trackless and noiseless through the keen night air.

As for the *Pageant* itself, written at the request of a member of Maria Francesca's sisterhood, Christina was "not without hopes that it might succeed as a drawing-room acting piece", though as many of the actors are realistically conceived birds and beasts, it is a little difficult to imagine how they could be introduced, even if clad in pelts or plumes after the fashion of Maeterlinck's dog and the *Chantecler* of Edmond Rostand. *The Months*—to give it its proper title—has actually been performed at the Albert Hall and elsewhere, unperformable though it seems when read. There is no plot; there is hardly any action; the characters come on and announce themselves like the tyrants and patriarchs of mediæval drama. Yet the dialogue is shot through with gleams of poetry pure enough to justify Swinburne's ardour of admiration, and the only defect is the inevitable one of monotony. Some of the cadences recall the light, supple lilts of *Sing-Song*, as, for example, in January's apostrophe to the robin:

Make haste to breakfast,
Come and fetch your crumb,
For I'm as glad to see you
As you are glad to come,

and the charming little song of July beginning

Blue flags, yellow flags, flags all freckled.

Most poets believe that they can do what very few are actually capable of doing, and that is to write a good play. It is perhaps fortunate that Christina's

objection to the stage on moral grounds should have deterred her from making any more ambitious attempts in the field of drama, for she had none of the necessary instincts and attributes of the successful playwright-poet. *A Pageant* suffers by comparison with "All Thy Works Praise Thee, O Lord", a choric song, or, as she calls it, "A Processional of Creation" based upon the canticle, *Benedicite, omnia opera.* We are not told what Swinburne thought of this, though the poet of "St. Dorothy" could hardly have remained unresponsive to its rich mediævalism and he who sang of the "sea-king and land-waster" must surely have loved the quatrains given to Thunder and Lightning, and to Night. The Song of the Three Children, like the succession of the seasons, had been a lifelong source of inspiration to Christina. As early as 1847 she had shown in "The World's Harmonies" how strong an appeal the great canticle made to her, and she reverted to it in her prose monograph, *Seek and Find.* The seasons, severally and collectively, pervade her lyrical poetry from first to last, and in " Mirrors of Life and Death", another of the 1881 poems criticised by Dante Gabriel, she catches all four phases of the terrestrial year in one quatrain:

> As Spring, all bloom and desire,
> As Summer, all gift and fire,
> As Autumn, a dying glow,
> As Winter, with nought to show.

It was not to the resurgent seasons that Dante Gabriel took exception, but to the sudden irruption of a mole and a mouse into the sequence of more solemn and august images which his sister imagines moving before her as in an enchanted glass. He was dis-

pleased when she saw the twin mysteries of life and death

As a Mouse
Keeping house
In the fork of a tree
With nuts in a crevice,
And an acorn or two;
What cares he
For blossoming boughs
Or the song-singing bevies
Of birds in their glee,
Scarlet, or golden, or blue?

As a Mole grubbing underground;
When it comes to the light
It grubs its way back again,
Feeling no bias of fur
To hamper it in its stir,
Scant of pleasure and pain,
Sinking itself out of sight
Without sound.

Dante Gabriel does not appear to have demurred either at the tropical coloration of "the birds in their glee", or at the loose rhythms and erratically distributed rhymes in what is practically a piece of *vers libres*. To satisfy him Christina "wove in a few fresh mirrors", but she stoutly declined to eliminate "the *m*. and *m*."

By virtue of the two sonnet sequences in the *Pageant* volume Christina Rossetti must take rank as something above a mere singer of heart-searching songs, or seer of visions at once sumptuous and grotesque. These sonnets have been thought worthy to usurp in this present book a chapter to themselves; but, as the poet herself observed, her tome had many sonnets, and some of them are unforgettable. "At Last" is good, and the triad, "The Thread of Life", even better. Unfortunately for her future biographers,

Christina abandoned towards middle life the excellent habit, formed in early girlhood, of dating each poem carefully with day, month, and year. Her brother, when editing the collected edition, was therefore fain to fix many of the later ones vaguely enough as "before 1882", or 1886, or 1893, as the case might be, and the exact period when this particular triad was written remains conjectural. The first of the three is the best, worthy to rank with some of the finest in the two great sonnet sequences. Nowhere does she use her favourite figures, anaphora, repetition, and antithesis to better purpose than in the octet:

> The irresponsive silence of the land,
> The irresponsive sounding of the sea,
> Speak both one message of one sense to me;
> Aloof, aloof, we stand aloof; so stand
> Thou too aloof bound with the flawless band
> Of inner solitude; we bind not thee;
> But who from thy self-chain shall set thee free?
> What heart shall touch thy heart, what hand thy hand?

The sestet is less good. Few things are harder of attainment for a poet than a closing *diminuendo* that is neither awkward nor weak, and if Christina lapsed sometimes she did so in very distinguished poetical company.

Among the long single poems of the *Pageant* volume is "An Old World Thicket". It might have been wiser either to choose a different title or to take Dante's phrase, *Una selva oscura*, which stands at the head, by way of one. This is an example of those strange introspective poems of hers, half—but only half—allegorical; poems of the same order as "From House to Home" and "Repining". They are traversed by streaks of compelling beauty, but it cannot be denied that they

afford a basis for the arguments of those critics who accuse her of morbidity. In this case the accusation would be easier to sustain if she had broken off at the end of the twenty-eighth stanza, instead of closing with the happy vision of the "homeward flock at peace". There is nothing here to lift the general level of the 1881 collection to that of the 1862 or even the 1866 poems. With the great and memorable exception of the sonnet sequences, and of certain of the scattered sonnets and devotional pieces, these "other poems" go some way towards justifying Richard Garnett's opinion that in the *Goblin Market* volume "she attained a height to which she never reached afterwards".

With the waning of the year 1881 Dante Gabriel's health declined alarmingly. He was sick in mind and body, and neither the substitution of morphia for chloral nor the unselfish ministrations of Watts-Dunton and Hall Caine could bring him much ease. Watts-Dunton has recorded how in the earlier days of the chloral mania at Cheyne Walk Christina and her mother used to appear at intervals, when the evil spirit was most potent, "and", he says, "no words of mine could convey to the reader the effect of having those two ladies moving about the house—a very dark house. They seemed to shed a new kind of light in every room and passage." That same tranquil light shone in Mr. John Seddon's Birchington bungalow when Dante Gabriel lay dying there in the opening months of the year 1882. William Michael received frequent letters from his sister concerning "our dear Gabriel", but neither from these nor from any other published correspondence of hers is it possible to guess what she really felt towards

that wayward, ill-coördinated, passionate genius. That she loved him truly is certain; that she admired his poetry and his paintings with a noble perspicacity and a generous enthusiasm is beyond question. Yet the interlude of his marriage set a distance between them that narrowed only in some degree after poor Lizzie's death, and it is hardly possible that she remained in ignorance either of his infatuation for Mrs. William Morris, or his association with the devastating "Mrs. H." Dante Gabriel himself was under no illusions. He told William Sharp that he had once shocked Maria Francesca and Christina by saying, when they had "expressed their envy of the martyred sisters of olden days" that they had had "more than their share of martyrdom in having such a vagabond brother to look after".

On Easter Sunday, 1882, Christina missed the early Eucharist through sitting up all night with the dying man, then only half conscious. The night that followed was the night of his death. When, five days later, he was buried in Birchington churchyard, his mother, the "Antique" of his unchanging devotion, dropped into the grave a bunch of wood-spurge and forget-me-nots gathered by his sister. Christina was with her, and before April ended she had traced the scene in twelve lines as intensely realised as any she ever wrote:

A lowly hill which overlooks a flat,
  Half-sea, half-countryside;
  A flat-shored sea, of low-voiced, creeping tide
Over a chalky, weedy mat.

A hill of hillocks, flowery and kept green
  Round Crosses raised for hope,
  With many-tinted sunsets where the slope
Faces the lingering western sheen.

A lowly hope, a height that is but low,
While time sets solemnly,
While the tide rises of eternity,
Silent, and neither swift nor slow.

While Christina was at Birchington with her brother Mr. J. H. Ingram wrote to suggest that she should contribute to a series of lives of eminent women then in the course of preparation under his editorship. She toyed, though not over-hopefully, with the idea, hesitating in her characteristic conscientious way as to whether a recluse like herself would be qualified to write a biography of any author who, like Miss Procter, had been her contemporary. To William Michael she wrote, "Mrs. Fry I would gladly try at, nor do I fancy I should find Lady Augusta Stanley insurmountable. I should decline the two Georges[1] and prefer leaving Miss Martineau. Mary Lamb I should think would be both manageable and well worth writing." The project lapsed for the moment, but was revived a year later, when Ingram proposed that she should undertake the life of Mrs. Browning. This proposition attracted Christina, who felt that she could "write with enthusiasm of that great poetess". Browning's co-operation, however, she regarded as indispensable, and as this was not forthcoming she relinquished the scheme altogether. The pertinacious Ingram next trotted out Mrs. Radcliffe, whom, quaintly enough, Miss Rossetti welcomed with open arms. "She takes my fancy more than many", said her might-have-been biographer, who, with the friendly aid of Professor Masson, Dr. Richard Garnett, and others, proceeded to collect materials for a monograph upon the ingenious

[1] Eliot and Sand.

authoress of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Whether such a monograph would have been well done or ill it is a little difficult to say. The necessary materials were found to be so meagre that in the event Christina could do nothing but "despair and withdraw". She would have proved a painstaking, appreciative, infinitely decorous, and infinitely discreet chronicler, but her "profane" prose is so devoid of colour and her point of view so serious that her most faithful admirers might rejoice that she did not do this thing. She would probably have succeeded better with Mrs. Browning, of whom she wrote nearly ten years later to Mr. Patchett Martin, in response to his published opinion that she herself was "the greater literary artist of the two", "I doubt whether the woman is born, or for many a long day will be born, who will balance, not to say outweigh, Mrs. Browning".

Before the first anniversary of Dante Gabriel's death came round, Michael, the baby son of William Michael and Lucy had died. This was the child whom his unbelieving parents had allowed Christina to baptize, and it is to their surrender that we owe the exquisite little threnody beginning

A Holy Innocent gone home,

a threnody not unworthy to rank with Milton's "On the Death of a Fair Infant". Perhaps out of regard for her sister-in-law's feelings Christina left the poem in manuscript. The year 1883 was a sad one, and its close set the colophon to the second and last love-chapter of her life. Something of herself lay dead with Charles Bagot Cayley on the morrow of her fifty-third birthday, and when she went alone to Hastings in the

grey early days of 1884 it was in a sense to her own place of sepulture that she made her pilgrimage as well as to his. Dante Gabriel had once charged his sister with "brooding by the grave of twice-buried hope", and now the phrase was metaphorical no more. There is some doubt as to the exact date of "Who Shall Say", the *New Poems* giving it as "*Circa* 1875", the collected edition as "*Circa* 1884". If—as would appear—William Michael's second conjecture comes nearer to the truth, it is interesting to compare the last stanza with the last of "When I am dead, my Dearest".

> Still my heart's love, thou,
> In thy secret way,
> And still remembered now:
> Who shall say—
> Still rememberest thou?

The outward form has changed little, though the "voluptuous pantings" of the earlier rhythm have slowed down. It is the singer now who remains in the world of the living while the beloved has passed beyond the bourne. Yet the unexpected note of dubiety in "And haply may forget" reverberates thirty-six years later in the low-toned question, "Still rememberest thou?" Its persistence is curious, if we take into account Christina's orthodoxy, hard as basalt, immutable as the solar law. Divine and human love contended for the mastery of her soul, and as to which strove harder, "Who shall say?"

> . . . chi non prova pena amor non prova,
> E quei non vive che non prova amore.

What though ultimate oblivion should scatter poppies over silent hearts and sealed eyes? She had lived; she had had her hour.

The tamed and twittering Swinburne, now ensconced at 2 The Pines, might have been regarded by Christina, one would suppose, as a more eligible acquaintance than the wild-plumed and wild-throated singer of the Cheyne Walk days; yet she does not seem to have responded with much enthusiasm to his overtures when *A Midsummer Holiday and other Poems* appeared, containing his "Ballad of Appeal to Christina G. Rossetti". There is something slightly pathetic in the patient fidelity of his admiration for her; one feels that if he had been permitted to approach he would have hovered round her, diffident and assiduous, as he had been wont to hover round her mother when they met in Cheyne Walk. But she seems to have regarded Swinburne as one of those poets who are better avoided by the serious-minded and the devout, and she was doubtless unaware that in her "Mariana" she had imitated his characteristic cadence quite as closely as she had imitated Tennyson's in "The Lowest Room".

All Christina's books of verse, up to and including *A Pageant*, had been dedicated to her mother, and in the collected edition of her poetical works the Sonnet of 1880 stands at the forefront as she would have desired that it should. Her love for Mrs. Rossetti was something in the nature of a cult. She felt always towards her what Petrarch did towards Laura when he wrote:

> s' alcun bel' frutto
> Nasce di me da voi vien primo il seme;
> Io son per me quasi un terreno asciutto
> Colto di voi, e il preggio è vostro in tutto.

Frances Rossetti died on April 8, 1886. Less than a month earlier her daughter had written to her the

last of the Valentines which eleven succeeding Februaries had brought forth, the last, and not the least charming, and certainly the most tender. Thereafter a subtle change may be discerned in many of Christina's graver poems. Till this time her actual tribulations had borne a curiously close resemblance to the imagined woes of her own early Zaras and Isidoras; but now sorrow speaks with a new voice, even when the words and rhythms are not new.

CHAPTER VII

THE TWO SONNET SEQUENCES

THE sonnet, though essentially alien and Italianate, has proved curiously appropriate to the Anglo-Saxon genius. Whether at its earliest emergence, in the form commonly called Shakespearean, or in its Petrarchan-Miltonic phase, or when Keats, *feliciter audax*, wrought of it something both antique and new, it has touched a succession of great spirits finely to fine issues. The heroic couplet, another superimposition, ended by making stiff the movement which it had begun simply by making regular. The discipline of the sonnet, on the other hand, has never hampered or formalised the workings of the English poetic intelligence. If additional proof were needed of its fundamentally Romantic character, this would be found in its comparative quiescence during the Augustan period.

To Christina Rossetti the exigencies of the sonnet form were singularly stimulating and astringent. They forced her to concentrate and capture her fluid and fugitive emotions, and made her in her own despite, terse, eloquent, and symmetrical. On the technical side she probably learnt much from Dante Gabriel, whose guiding principles she must have accepted, as she certainly gave them faithful application. From

Dante and Petrarch she derived the Italian form so much better suited to her genius than the Elizabethan. Mrs. Browning, though she was made to provide a most effective drop-scene for *Monna Innominata*, counts for little. It is almost impossible that Christina had read the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* when she wrote "Remember Me" in 1849. The young Rossettis were greatly addicted to *bouts rimés*, and these usually ran into the quatorzain mould. Nothing could have been more natural than that the youngest should follow the eldest and make use of this exquisite vehicle, of which the Italian origin may have been an additional "pull". What she probably got from Mrs. Browning —though she might just as well have got it from Petrarch or Samuel Daniel, Sidney, Drayton, or Shakespeare—was the idea of stringing a series of sonnets together, connected by a slender, supple thread of sensation, emotion, and thought, and forming a corporate whole. Unlike Dante, she interspersed no segments of prose; and in this she showed wisdom, for, except when employed as a medium for devotional self-expression, her prose has a strange monochrome quality.

Most of Christina Rossetti's sonnets are, as Dante Gabriel laid it down that every sonnet ought to be,

> a moment's monument,
> Memorial from the soul's eternity
> To one dead, deathless moment.

So far she follows her brother. In the matter of form she breaks boldly away from him. He was almost uniformly faithful to the Petrarchan quatorzain, with its octet rhymed *a b b a*, *a b b a*, and its sestet consisting of two, or sometimes of three, rhymes.

Within certain limits she allows herself considerable latitude. In the third of the *Monna Innominata* sonnets, for example, she carries the *b*-rhyme of the octet into the first and sixth lines of the sestet, hardly an orthodox proceeding. In *Later Life* she seems at one point to have sealed herself of the tribe of Pier delle Vigne, rhyming the octet *a b a b a b, a b*, and the sestet *c d c, c d c*; elsewhere in the same sequence she groups her octave rhymes *a b a b b a a b*, which amounts to something like heterodoxy. She is capable, too, of something even more alien to English prosodic canons, and that is, not a "French" rhyme, but a simple repetition. This, though a legitimate device in the lyric, is seldom to be found in the sonnet. It seems, indeed, as if Christina's one guiding principle was that a sonnet should have fourteen lines. After that, *vogue la galère!*

These easy heresies of hers, though possibly painful to the purist, give a certain charm to the poems in which she reveals them. She is not cramped or irked by the artificial restraints imposed upon themselves by her Sicilian and Tuscan examplars; she has the true English instinct for compromise. Few poets not actually in conscious revolt against tradition have ever been less amenable to prosodic discipline than she. Watts-Dunton descried in this fact one of her claims to authentic greatness. "Of all contemporary poets", he wrote, "she had seemed to me the most indubitably inspired. . . . Her very uncertainty of touch as regarded execution seemed somehow to add to the impression made upon me of inspiration." Her best verse has certainly its full share of that incomprehensible quality which, when men first became aware of

it, suggested to them that something, some breath of mysterious life, had been breathed into the nostrils of the poet. It was that same "something" that, according to William Michael, "impelled her feelings or 'came into her head', and her hand obeyed the dictation". He adds the curious information that except in 1848, when the whole family were in the throes of the *bouts rimés* craze, he could not remember ever seeing her "in the act of composition", so elusive and so reticent was her Muse.

The twenty-eight *Later Life* sonnets are not interrelated with the same intimacy as are the fourteen of the *Monna Innominata* series. Intensely personal though they may be, and clearly though they reflect the phases of emotional experience to which they belong, there is no underlying unity. Some are simply subjective, some are purely devotional, one derives from the Italian journey of 1865, another may or may not refer to the death of Maria Francesca. Another, the eighth, might refer to William Michael and his wife, or to Dante Gabriel and William Michael, or even to William Michael and Charles Bagot Cayley. All through there is an irrelevance and a divagation of mood and subject which makes the sensitive reader half regret that there should have been any assembling of such incompatible elements. The pebbly strand of Sussex, the forget-me-nots of St. Gothard, the nightingales of Como, the "ice-bound seas that are like seas of stone", succeed each other as the pictures do in a mid-Victorian scrap-book. The mentality of the poet is the one connecting thread, and on that thread are strung beads of unequal sizes and incongruous colours. It is otherwise with *Monna Innominata*, which has the

effect of a chaplet of perfectly matched pearls. *Later Life* begins with an affirmation which has almost the clang of the first verse in Genesis; nothing could be less theological or less didactic than the opening phrases of *Monna Innominata*. In the shorter sequence the note of quiet passion never ceases to be audible. In the longer, even the theological element, though "always breaking in", gives neither coherence nor continuity; and wherever profane love is suffered to appear, the heavily draped image of sacred love is set as a counterpoise. The first five sonnets of *Later Life* are definitely devotional, and the close of the fourth has a curious dull throb, as of a clenched hand beating the breast:

> Me, Lord, Thou seest, though I see not Thee;
> Me now, as once the Thief in Paradise,
> Even me, O Lord, my Lord, remember me!

Not until the eighth is it possible to establish some sort of direct contact between what she says and what we are justified in imagining that she feels. This is the vehement sonnet referred to above, the one which begins,

> We see and feel with different hearts and eyes;
> Ah, Christ, if all our hearts could meet in Thee!

If this sequence had been closely dated the transition from the eighth sonnet to the ninth might have been clear. We have no way of knowing whether they came into existence in their present order; yet on internal evidence it seems possible that, after realising the vast gulf, as of interstellar space, severing her spirit from some whom her love would not relinquish without a struggle, she turned to the thought that some mystic

and immutable sympathy might unite those far-sundered entities in the scheme of "one dear heaven".

Star Sirius and the Pole Star dwell afar
Beyond the drawings of each other's strength.
One blazes through the brief, bright summer's length
Lavishing life-heat from a flaming car;
While one unchangeable upon a throne
Broods o'er the frozen heart of earth alone,
Content to reign a bright particular star
Of some who wander or of some who groan.
They own no drawings of each other's strength
Nor vibrate in a visible sympathy,
Nor veer along their courses each toward each:
Yet are their orbits pitched in harmony
Of one dear heaven, across whose depth and length
Mayhap they talk together without speech.

The rhyme-grouping here is almost erratic. Ears attuned to the pendulum-like regularity of the Petrarchan form or the not less even and steady click and swing of the Elizabethan might well be affronted by the temerity which groups the rhymes of any sonnet after this fashion. Yet only the most petrified pedantry could deny that the result is good.

Few poets of less than Shakespearean stature can risk a whimsical interpolation in a sequence of serious and even tragic poems. We should be disconcerted to find Christina inserting one of her more light-hearted efforts in *Later Life*. We might even demand of her that she should sustain the high, grave note all through. Yet she does not spare us grotesque lapses, such as—

For half life's seemings are not what they seem
And vain the laughs we laugh, the shrieks we shriek,

or such patches of crypto-prose as—

The narrower total seems to suit the few.

There is no technical barrier to our enjoyment of the thirteenth in the series, which moves with an Eliza-

bethan gait and almost in Elizabethan garb, catching at least as many gleams from Bacon's *Essays* as from Shakespeare's sonnets. The form is Italian, but the close-packed images and antitheses, the colour and cadence, the almost euphuistic quaintness and "preciousness" of some of the metaphors, all these things are as essentially Elizabethan as a pearl-sewn stomacher or a pair of razed shoes gay with Provincial roses.

> Shame is a shadow cast by sin; yet shame
> Itself may be a glory and a grace,
> Re-fashioning the sin-disfashioned face;
> A nobler bruit than hollow-sounded fame,
> A new-lit lustre on a tarnished name,
> One virtue pent within an evil place,
> Strength for the fight and swiftness for the race,
> A stinging salve; a life-requickening flame.
> A salve so searching we may scarcely live,
> A flame so fierce it seems that we must die,
> An actual cautery thrust into the heart.

These lines produce a curious illusion, as if one saw Miss Rossetti in unfamiliar raiment, her "belated crinoline" changed to a farthingale, her narrow neck-frill expanded into a lace-pranked ruff. It is a short-lived illusion, for immediately afterwards theology breaks in yet again, and the Elizabethan atmosphere is dispersed.

The penultimate sonnet of *Later Life* has a personal poignancy which almost entitles it to rank with Cowper's "Castaway". "This forecast of death", writes William Michael, "came singularly true; for if one had been writing a condensed account of Christina Rossetti's last days and hours one might have described them very nearly in these terms." And for lovers of Christina "these terms" are sad reading.

Too dulled it may be for a last Good-bye,
Too comfortless for anyone to soothe,
A helpless, charmless spectacle of ruth
Through long last hours, so long while yet they fly,
So long to those who hopeless in their fear
Watch the slow breath and look for what they dread,
While I, supine, with ears that cease to hear,
With eyes that glaze, with heart pulse running down
(Alas! no saint rejoicing on her bed),
May miss the goal at last, may miss a crown.

Christina Rossetti's half-unconscious Calvinism was not, perhaps, of the terrific type that "filled Bedlam with predestination". It was enough to strain but not to snap the sensitive cords of her mind. It did not thrust her into an unplumbed gulf with *actum est de te* in her ears and the quiver of eternal flames before her eyes. She never felt sure that she was damned; she only felt that she *might* be. On the other hand it may be doubted whether she was ever quite as sunnily and serenely sane as Cowper was in his intervals of release. She is often called morbid. Even her faithful champion, Mr. Mackenzie Bell, does not defend her from the charge. Mrs. Meynell suggested that "her portrait should have been painted with a skull on the table", and her friend Dr. Richard Garnett wrote, when deploring her spare use of the pruning knife, that "no excision . . . could have removed the taint of disease which clings to her most beautiful poetry, whether secular or religious, "Goblin Market" excepted". Mr. Walter de la Mare, however, without unconditionally repudiating the charge, declares that, "while she wrote even her most desperate and tragic poems her mind was exalted at a hazardous rest, and not only happy in the presence of the truth and reality she was striving to express, but in the achievement of expressing them fully and truly".

Before we condemn Christina Rossetti as morbid it is perhaps desirable that we should attempt some definition of morbidity. Is it an excessive preoccupation with the idea of death? Is it "looking for death as for a blessed thing"? Then it may be that the common condemnation must hold good. Is it an unbalanced, neurotic, almost decadent concentration upon "death's adjuncts ghastly and uncouth"? Then surely she stands exculpated. She regards death, as she regards life, with a subjective vision. She thinks little of it in the abstract. She does not envisage it as the Θάνατος of Euripides, the dark wrestler with whom Hercules strove for Alcestis, nor as the *pallida Mors* of Horace, knocking with impartial foot at the poor man's hovel and the King's high tower. To her it was not, as it was to Browning, "Death with his sunbeam", nor as it was to Vaughan, the "jewel of the just". She confronts death as an experience, at once physical and spiritual, which every child of the earth must undergo in order that the ultimate destiny of the immortal part shall be determined. In one aspect it is an ending, disfigured by the material concomitants of mortality, change, horror, disintegration; on the other, it is a transition from this life, with its "numbness and balk", to a life where for certain happy souls all odds shall be made even. As to the future fate of her mother and Maria Francesca, Christina felt no cold thrill of uncertainty; if she has any doubts concerning Dante Gabriel or William Michael, she either hushes them or contends with them. She permits herself to dream sometimes of a reunion between herself and Charles Bagot Cayley in some far-off world where his virtues shall be remembered and her shortcomings forgotten.

It is only when she turns her eyes inward that faith darkens, and the faint flame of hope sinks low.

Est quaedam flere voluptas. Christina Rossetti might not have endorsed this proposition of Ovid, but there were moments when she proved in herself that it was not without some element of truth. At such moments she would lift the alembic in which her tears were distilled, and let the light of her genius shine through it from every angle, with every freak of colour and refraction that might be. Lovers of her poetry owe too much to these moods of hers to condemn their genesis too severely. And to be melancholy is not necessarily to be morbid. It might have gone ill with many great poets were it otherwise.

False semblant was of all conceivable sins the most impossible to this particular poet. If ever she held a mask before her face, its features were her own, and not another's. Such a mask is the foreword to the *Monna Innominata* sequence. Beatrice and Laura, she there explains, "were preceded by a bevy of unnamed ladies, *donne innominate*, sung by a school of less conspicuous poets", and she suggests that in "that land and at that period which gave simultaneous birth to Catholics, to Albigenses, and to Troubadours, one can imagine many a lady as sharing her lover's poetic aptitude. Had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend." There follows the inevitable allusion to Mrs. Browning, "the Great Poetess of our own day and nation", who, if she had been unhappy instead of happy, might have bequeathed to us "in lieu of the Portuguese Sonnets an inimitable *donna innominata*

. . . worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura".

It behoves us to take the hint, and to accept the *Monna Innominata* of this Sonnet of Sonnets as a symbolical person, the outcome of a conscious act of evocation, "such a lady" as might have lived in Provence in the twelfth, or in Italy in the thirteenth century, and who might—though this does not seem highly probable—have given utterance to her heart's secret somewhat after this fashion. The head-lines, one from Dante and one from Petrarch, which usher in each sonnet are like so many stage properties, cardboard walls, and painted hedges, designed to heighten the very illusion which they tend to destroy. There is little or no attempt at any local or archaic colour, and indeed history was not Christina's strong point. What she had, and what did her yeoman service in such poems as "The Prince's Progress" and "Noble Sisters", was a sense, pictorial rather than poetical, of a slightly indistinct but very picturesque mediæval *mise-en-scène*. Her mediævalism was as devoid of perspective as Italian art before Paolo Uccello. It was not definite, purposeful, laborious, like the mediævalism of William Morris. It was more akin to the vague conceptions of Dante Gabriel and of Burne-Jones, to whom the Middle Ages were an indeterminate period, full of lovely suggestions for ballads and frescoes, when a golden-haired knight would bear

> a green banner wrought
> With one white lily stem,

and a lady clad in "vair and purple dyes" would look down from a massy tower upon a moat starred with

lily-buds. Even these decorative conventions are absent from *Monna Innominata*. It is no more mediæval than Mrs. Browning's sonnets are Portuguese.

Between Mrs. Browning's sonnets and Christina's there are certain manifest affinities and certain marked divergences. Arguments as to which of the two wrought the better are bound to be both unprofitable and inconclusive. Mrs. Browning's poetic pulses beat harder and quicker; she herself was like the "pomegranate which, if cut deep down the middle, shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a veined humanity", the pomegranate to which she had compared Browning. But she does not excel Christina in poignant and yet restrained beauty of utterance, in low-toned tenderness, in effortless music of form and phrase. This may have been because she was inspired not by frustration but by fulfilment. Yet this very fulfilment need not have obliterated that sense of transience almost inseparable from the finest love-poetry. Catullus and Villon, Ronsard and Herrick, they are all mindful that unreturning time must bear away love, and the lover, and all loveliness, with the snows and the daffodils of yesteryear. To Christina Rossetti love came in the grey weeds of renunciation. Mrs. Browning, happy in this world and confidently hoping to be happy in the next, believed that the flower that once has blown for ever *lives*, and it may be that her poetry suffered a little from that belief.

Among English sonneteers, the first place having been bespoken for Shakespeare, some critics might be inclined to rank these two Victorian women-poets as high as any. They do not hold their station as he holds his, by pure poetic pre-eminence. If it were so,

Milton and Keats would stand above them. But neither of these two most glorious Johns tried to do what both Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning succeeded in doing, and that was to compose a cycle of sonnets recording a cycle of emotional experience. Philip Sidney, Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, Drummond of Hawthornden all made the attempt, but hardly to better purpose. It is true that few, if any, of the *Monna Innominata* or the *Portuguese* sonnets transcend the finest of the *Astrophel.* or the *Idea*, or the *Delia* sequences; and most certainly there is none that could be set undimmed beside Shakespeare's best. What makes the achievement of the two Victorians memorable is the high poetic level which they not only reached, but maintained. They are both only too prone to flop and to meander; and they are able to resist this innate tendency from the very first quatorzain to the very last.

The cadence of *Monna Innominata* is at times almost startingly Shakespearean. Nowhere else has Christina Rossetti used her gift of unstilted poetic diction with more magnificent effect. She achieves in these fourteen sonnets the perfect fusion of emotion and language, the soul and the body of poetry. She was not often influenced by Shakespeare. It may be doubted whether she knew his sonnets well or, if she had known them well, would have approved them much. She never imitated him wittingly, as she did Tennyson and Dante Gabriel. Her homage to Shakespeare was, indeed, a little perfunctory, a little conventional. One suspects that in her intercourse with the poet she was usually chaperoned either by Mr. Bowdler or Dr. Dod. It is true that in an unpublished letter

to Sir Wyndham Dunstan she observed that "Shakespeare incomparably more than Milton reminds me of the Bible", but she can hardly have been thinking of the *Sonnets*. The affinity between them and her own is all the more remarkable.

"Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke", "Death following hard on life gains ground apace", "And who hath found love's citadel unmanned?"—are not these of the right Shakespearean stuff? She is, however, more chary of adornments than he. Except for Esther's "one mesh of silken hair", a reminiscence of "one strangling golden hair" in "Body's Beauty", there is hardly a single touch of colour in *Monna Innominata*. Even the "common flowers that blow with corn" are left unnamed and so without definite forms or hues. And yet there is no coldness, no sense of dearth. Form and sound are so rich that the absence of colour is hardly perceptible.

All the *Monna Innominata* sonnets are simple, passionate, and spontaneous. With the exception of the eighth, there is none that bears any sign of extraneous influence, any touch or tinct taken from prophet, poet, or sage, epic, legend, or history. The range of experience is never wide, but it is always deep. Here Christina Rossetti's mind runs in a channel carved out by the confluent streams of love and sorrow. Sometimes, as in the fourth, sixth, and eleventh sonnets, her personal renunciation and the scruple which dictated it may contract the radius of her appeal; at other moments she attains absolute universality. Emotion melts so naturally into words that to read these poems is like listening to the secret rhythms of the heart. And the transition from one phase of feeling to another

is always quiet and unforced. The first three sonnets might well be the successive stages in a single "pause of thought". This will be seen if we set the opening lines of each in sequence.

I

Come back to me, who wait and watch for you;
Or come not yet, for it is over then.

II

I wish I could remember that first day,
First hour, first moment, of my meeting you.

III

I dream of you, to wake; would that I might
Dream of you, and not wake, but slumber on.

She looks back, and confesses, "I loved you first"; she looks forward, and makes orison, and commends her lover to the mercy of God; she looks inward, and sees herself with "Youth gone and beauty gone", sees herself, as indeed she sometimes was, lacking in fortitude, lacking in faith,

And yet not hopeless quite, not faithless quite,
Because not loveless.

There is solace for her in the realisation of her lover's "honoured excellence"; solace in the thought that so much excellence must surely be "safe in the economy of God". She thinks of those who in the years to come will learn the story of their love, and will invoke the vanished figures of herself and of him who, like herself, set before all other things "*la virtude, la veritade*".

Many in aftertimes will say of you
"He loved her"—while of me what will they say?
Not that I loved you more than just in play,
For fashion's sake as idle women do.

Even let them prate; who know not what we knew
  Of love and parting in exceeding pain,
  Of parting hopeless here to meet again,
Hopeless on earth, and heaven is out of view.
But by my heart of love laid bare to you,
  My love that you can make not void or vain,
Love that foregoes you but to claim anew,
Beyond this passage of the gate of death,
  I charge you at the Judgment make it plain
My love of you was life and not a breath.

It would be difficult for even the least intuitive of Christina Rossetti's admirers to imagine her loving anything or anyone "as idle women do"; but it may be that the third and fourth lines of this octet are coloured by a sudden and somewhat belated recollection of the shadowy Provençal lady to whom all fourteen sonnets are supposed to be appropriate. Like Mrs. Browning, she would fain follow love beyond the House of Life, and there is a curious dissimilarity between the two lines of her pursuit. In the sonnet just quoted, and in the posthumous sonnets "By Way of Remembrance", her thought is conditioned by conventional eschatology. Elsewhere, as in the fourth of the *Rosseggiar dell' Oriente* poems, she has a vision of herself meeting Cayley either *nell' eterna pace* or *in cerchio maledetto*. It is to be observed that she feels few and faint misgivings as to his eternal portion. For herself she might have both doubts and fears; for herself she might feel, with Doctor Johnson, that "no man can be sure that his obedience and repentance will obtain salvation"; but for *him* she could not easily envisage eternal damnation. She may have hoped that he might find quiet lodging, as John Wesley hoped that Marcus Aurelius might, among the Virtuous Pagans.

In *Monna Innominata* she reverts to the idea,

shadowed forth in "When I am dead, my dearest", of a long-drawn-out and profound slumber after death; not, indeed, an everlasting and certainly not a dreamless sleep, but a middle state of quiescence, akin to the Paradise of orthodox belief though not identical with it, between the stress and travail of life and the terrible splendours of the *Dies Irae* :

> If thus to sleep is sweeter than to wake
> To die were surely sweeter than to live.

This was the attitude of mind indicated by William Michael as the *Aspiration for Rest* when he detached and attempted to classify "Some Leading Themes or key-notes of feeling in the poems of Christina Rossetti", though he does not include the particular sonnet in which the lines occur. It would have been easy to find more than eighteen poems where this is "the key-note of feeling" as a counterpoise to the thirty which he has ranged in the *Love of Animals* group. A sense of the transience and worthlessness of all things beneath the visiting moon, a sense of craving after something never found on earth, these are the twin bases upon which the whole fabric of Christina Rossetti's poetry is upheld.

> Why should I seek and never find
> That something which I have not had?
> Fair and unutterably sad
> The world hath sought time out of mind;
> The world hath sought and I have sought,—
> Ah, empty world and empty I!

CHAPTER VIII

DEVOTIONAL VERSE—PROSE

WHEN early in the eighteen-eighties William Sharp paid his first call upon the Rossetti ladies, he found Christina reading aloud to her mother. After tea Mrs. Rossetti took occasion to ask "Gabriel's young friend" if he were acquainted with the poetry of Robert Southwell, and on his replying in the negative she said, "My dear Christina was reading a wonderful little poem of his just as your visit was announced. I am sure you would like to hear it. My dear, do read it again".

The "little poem" was "The Burning Babe"; and as he sat listening to the beautiful, precise voice of the younger lady, Mr. Sharp etched upon his memory a perdurable picture of the "small, rather gloomy room, with Mrs. Rossetti sitting back with a white Shetland shawl across her shoulders and the lamplight falling on her white hair". We are his debtors for that picture, and for the incidental knowledge that Christina was acquainted with Southwell. She was never a "bookish" woman, though her sympathies were elastic enough to comprehend both Turgenev and Emily Dickenson. In profane literature she trod warily; and even in sacred literature, apart from the Bible and certain Biblical commentaries, she was not deeply versed. It seems

that she had entered only partially and superficially upon that great heritage of devotional poetry bequeathed by the Plantagenet, Tudor, and Caroline ages to the English-speaking peoples. Her opportunities were, of course, more scanty than ours in these days when such rare gems as the Christ Church descant find their way into popular anthologies; and if her friend Garnett introduced her to the publications of the Early English Text Society, contact with the Lambeth and Vernon MSS. left no discernible traces upon either her craftmanship or her imagination.

Neither her ignorance nor her knowledge counts for much in the genesis of her own devotional verse. Where it resembles that of Crashaw, of Vaughan, of George Herbert, the likeness is almost certainly the result of an affinity of temperament and outlook between herself and them. And however near she may draw to them when she is at her strongest, she drops away lamentably when she waxes weak. Her desk was her *prie-Dieu*, and pious chansons flowed from her hand almost automatically as she bent over it. She was always ready to say,

> I lift up wistful eyes and bow my knee,

and to suit the action to the word. "That soul", wrote John Donne, "who, whatsoever string be strucken in her, base or treble, is ever tuned towards God, that soul prays sometimes when it does not know it prays." And that soul was Christina Rossetti's.

In much of her pious poetry there is an almost total absence of that thrust and counter-thrust of image and ideation inseparable from the best in this

kind. The Carolines are all instinct with it. They seldom make the reader long to hurl at them the immortal adjuration of the old lady in *David Copperfield*, "Let us have no meandering"; and it cannot be said that Miss Rossetti never does. One hundred and seventy-two pages of William Michael's collected edition are occupied by devotional poems culled from her various volumes, from *Time Flies*, from *Called to Be Saints* and *The Face of the Deep*, from the *Verses* published in 1891 by the S.P.C.K., from anthologies such as the *Lyra Messianica*, and from her notebooks and manuscripts. He has gleaned the stubble-fields most religiously; the harvest would be twice as rich were it half as great. Much has been admitted that a sterner critic would have excluded; yet among these four hundred and forty-nine poems are some of the exquisite songs of the *Lyra Anglicana*. One says *Anglicana* advisedly. Christina Rossetti's appeal is primarily to the Church in which she was bred. It may be doubted whether anything she has written has the universality of "Lead, Kindly Light". Nonconformists are apt to find her too sacerdotal. To Roman Catholics she is a good Catholic *manquée*. But there is no school of Anglican thought or practice to which she is alien. The ritualist will rejoice in "Lo, Newborn Jesus", and "Lord Babe, if Thou art He", and a dozen others as simple in form, as rich in colour as any Madonna of Orcagna or Cimabue; the modernist finds nothing to affront him in "Time Passeth Away", or in the Septuagesima hymn, "One step more"; both will give thanks for "Up Hill", and "Heaven Over-Arches", and "Grant us such Grace".

When Christina Rossetti's right hand forgets its cunning her devotional verses can be as trite as the quatrains on a Christmas card, as stuffy as the smell of pitch-pine and red baize. When her imagination is working at high pressure, when she is subjected to that inexplicable influence from without that is not unlike possession, it is difficult to find similes for her songs. They are as lambent as the glassy sea of the Apocalypse, as wistful as the face of a Florentine Virgin, as gorgeous as the wings of Fra Angelico's red-robed angels, as sonorous as an introit by Palestrina.

In her devotions, as in all things, she was introspective and—after her own peculiar fashion—egotistical. As Mr. Walter de la Mare has pointed out, "She asks, Am I saved? rather than, Are you?" The piety of her brother has preserved more than nine hundred of her English poems, and among them there are seventy-seven beginning with the pronoun "I", and only six with "we"; twenty beginning with "my", only seven with "our". It may be objected that most poets, especially lyrical poets, have an excusable affection for the first person singular. Yet the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, with its eight hundred and eighty-three poems, contains only fifty-four in which "I" is the initial word; Tennyson uses it only fourteen times as a jumping-off point, and Shakespeare in the *Sonnets* only twice. This is a prosaic and insensitive standard to apply, but it gives the measures of Christina's artless egotism.

In that *Century of Roundels* which Swinburne dedicated so diffidently and so gracefully to Miss Rossetti there is one defining the scope and character of the roundel form. A roundel, he says,

is wrought as a ring in a star-bright sphere,
With craft of delight and with cunning of sound unsought,
That the heart of the hearer may smile if to pleasure his ear
A roundel is wrought.

Christina's own first essay was made, says William Michael, "before 1886". This leaves us in doubt as to whether it was Swinburne's example that inspired her, for the *Century of Roundels* appeared in 1883. She certainly did not follow Swinburne's formula for the roundel as faithfully as she followed Dante Gabriel's for the sonnet. Her bent is almost wholly devotional; love and mourning, remembrance, fear, and even rapture are allowed their part, but laughter is notably absent from these "jewels of music". The conventions of the form, though their discipline proved less bracing than that of the sonnet, were good for her; they provided a sort of trellis-work upon which her thoughts might clamber and cling. There are between twenty and thirty roundels among her pious poems, some mediocre, some of authentic beauty, "round as a pearl or a tear". Her facility, seldom fatal to her sonnets, gives to certain of her roundels a spinelessness which their intricate structure serves only to make more devastating. Her mood is most often one of simple and absolute absorption in the contemplation of the things that are eternal. Sometimes this absorption seems to have a curious stultifying effect. At such times she fills in the ends of her lines with words that seem to be chosen almost at hazard merely because they possess the indicated sound-values, as, for example, in the roundel beginning—

Tremble, thou earth, at the Presence of the Lord.

Here the phrase "organ's girth" is introduced with

an almost audible jerk in the second line of the second quatrain in order to chime with the recurrent exhortation, "Tremble, thou earth". This is certainly not what Swinburne meant by "cunning of sound unsought!"

It was one of the peculiar results of her bilingual heredity and education that most of Christina Rossetti's Italian poems should sound like ingenious translations from English, while many of her more ecstatic English poems have the air of equally ingenious translations from Italian. Some of her hymns have a distinctly Tuscan complexion. More characteristic, and more typical of her angle of vision in the affairs of the soul, is the roundel beginning "Grant us such Grace", which is really "wrought as a ring", though the sphere is not exactly "star-bright". The change of image in the central triplet is a little abrupt, because it is obvious that "waters deep and still" can neither hasten nor loiter; but there are few virtues more essentially unpoetical than consistency:

> Grant us such grace that we may work Thy will,
> And speak Thy words, and walk before Thy face,
> Profound and calm, like waters deep and still;
> Grant us such grace.
>
> Not hastening and not loitering in our pace
> For gloomiest valley or for sultriest hill,
> Content and fearless in our downward race.
>
> As rivers seek a sea they cannot fill
> But are themselves filled full in its embrace,
> Absorbed, at rest, each river and each rill;
> Grant us such grace.

"I have often thought", wrote William Michael, "that Christina's proper place was in the Roman

Catholic Church, yet I never traced any inclination in her to join it." In a sense that great Church might have been the "proper place" for many perturbed spirits who never showed any Romeward tendency. The blight of Calvinism could not have touched either Dr. Johnson or Cowper if they had sought refuge in the Ark of St. Peter; but in the England of the Augustans such a change of creed would have been difficult both of conception and of execution. Lord George Gordon's conversion to Judaism could hardly have worn a more fantastic look! For Christina Rossetti no such barriers lay athwart the road to Rome. She was fifteen when Newman reached the end of that road, nearly forty when the secession of the third Marquis of Bute startled Queen Victoria and inspired Mr. Disraeli to write *Lothair*. The fact that conversions were neither few nor unremarkable during her impressionable years would have made easy for her a step which would have been practically impossible for Johnson or Cowper a century before. And it is certain that if she had heard a call, not even her "beloved example, friend, mother" could have deterred her from obedience. Richard Garnett's suggestion that her "patriotism as an Italian" was a stumbling-block can hardly convince us if we recollect that she derived that patriotism from a father with whose anti-clerical views she can have had little in common. What would appear to be the truth is that she was congenitally unresponsive to the influence of Rome; she was, as it were, a non-conductor. Neither on the æsthetic nor on the doctrinal side did she react to the Roman stimulus. In this she was the true child not only of her mother, but of the Pre-Raphaelite move-

ment, which, though a backwash of the Oxford movement, left the leading Pre-Raphaelites in the same sectarian niches that they occupied before it engulfed them.

Christina's attitude to James Collinson is enough to show that in early life she was free from any bitter anti-Roman bias; and the sonnet which she wrote on the death of Cardinal Newman proves that forty years later the straitest Anglican orthodoxy had not contracted her spiritual sympathies. What, then, was the streak in her which made her insensitive to those powerful influences that had determined Newman's fate? It was temperamental; it was a derivative, both by inheritance and precept, from Frances Rossetti. If any single deterrent factor can be isolated from the rest it was probably, as William Sharp suggested, her lifelong aversion to mariolatry. Had some strong conjunction of forces not immobilised her in her Anglican groove, the Church of Rome might have gained a woman-mystic not unworthy to stand beside St. Teresa and St. Catherine of Siena.

Her mysticism was not a mood, but a state of mind; it was indeed of that type defined by Dean Inge as "the attempt to realise the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or, more generally, as *the attempt to realise, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal and the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal*". (Italics the Dean's.) This definition explains the curious and constant flux and reflux in her poetry between the transient image and the perdurable reality which that image not only expresses but comprehends. She was not, like St. Francis and St. Teresa, an ecstatic by nature, though she had her

moments of brief and exquisite exaltation. She could not confront the enigmas of time and eternity with the proud courage of Emily Bronte; she does not strive to lift herself to the stars upon the wings of prayer. Rather does she bow her head in the dust and importune the angels to descend and comfort her. Believing as she did in the *forza irresistibile dell' umile preghiera*, she saw most clearly when her hands were folded before her down-bent face.

In her devotional verse Christina Rossetti allowed herself a wide prosodic range. Apart from the sonnets and roundels, her stanza-building is on the whole more free and more resourceful there than in her secular lyrics, though she never reverted to what Professor Saintsbury called the "dedoggerelised Skeltonic" of "Goblin Market". Few of the sonnets in this category are better than "Not Yours but You", where the dialogue is manipulated with rare dexterity, and in the sestet the very simple monosyllables lend an indefinable unearthly quality to the colloquy between Christ and the soul. There are many good things and some lovely ones among the miscellaneous carols and canticles compared by William Sharp to white and purple lilac bushes. Among those in which she uses the dialogue form are the fine triad called "The Three Enemies" and the rather clumsily entitled "Ye have Forgotten the Exhortation", both written before she was thirty, and the very late and interesting little lyric in *The Face of the Deep*, beginning,

> "Can I know it?"—"Nay".—
> "Shall I know it?"—"Yea",

where she adheres to one rhyme-sound through all the seven four-lined stanzas. She tries various experi-

ments, some happier than others, with rhythm and metre, contracting or expanding her lines with strange temerity and equally strange success. She can make the verse clang and throb; she can make it pipe and twitter. She, who knew so little of mediæval prosody, could use the "minikin" line with a light, sure touch not unworthy of the anonymous hymnodist of the Lambeth MS., as when she wrote:

Where never tempest heaveth;
Nor sorrow grieveth,
Nor death bereaveth,
Sleep.

Was she acquainted with Dan John of Reading? Probably not. Yet the affinities between "Sumer is i-cumen in" and this little spring song are obvious and delightful:

The twig sprouteth,
The moth outeth,
The plant springeth,
The bird singeth

. . . .

The twig teacheth,
The moth preacheth,
The plant vaunteth,
The bird chanteth.

Only the didactic lines that follow each trilling quatrain betray the Victorian *dévote* anxious to improve the occasion, and so break the illusion.

Christina Rossetti's praying-robes are shot through with recurrent colours and patterns, with the green of the martyr's palm and of the heavenly pastures, the white of the martyr's robe and of the fields ripe for harvest. She makes antithesis and anaphora the woof and warp, and seems to take pleasure in the movement of the shuttle, as in this colloquy between life and death:

"Wreathe the violets"—"Watch them fade"—
"I am sunshine"—"I am shade"—
"I am the sun-burying west."
"I am pleasure"—"I am rest;
Come with me for I am best."

Sometimes a remembrance of the joyful death of Maria Francesca or of the tranquil life of their mother gives her moments of vicarious joy and tranquillity; at others, her sense of beauty triumphs over all her misgivings, and the images of the "cross cruciferous", of the saints mounting the steeps of Zion, of the

garden full of silence and of dew
Beside a virgin cave,

lift her above herself, and make her transcend her wonted themes. The peculiar virtue of her best religious poetry lies in the infusion of her own unique and intimate quality into familiar and even conventional forms. Many maiden ladies of the Anglican communion have written verse eminently suitable for inclusion in books of pious meditation, and much of their verse resembles much of hers in tone, temper, and impress. But moments come when she takes the stereotyped matrices of their common use and pours into them molten gold. In the whole range of poetical activity nothing is so delicate or so difficult as the writing of a hymn, a new hymn that will fall quietly and naturally into its place among the old, the dear, the memory-hallowed hymns of other days. Alone among women writers of English Christina Rossetti is capable of giving life to lyrics worthy to rank with the best of Ken and Cowper, Watts, Wesley, and Newman, lyrics which make the sweetness of Sarah F. Adams and Cecil Frances Alexander seem almost too sweet, and the

prettiness of Heber and Walsham Howe perhaps a little too pretty. She certainly did not let this talent fust in her unused.

Of her nine prose works six are devotional in character, and of these six, four are broken up by interpolations in verse. Her first adventure in secular prose was the publication in 1870 of *Commonplace and other Short Stories*. In a prefatory note she explains that the earliest tale dates back to 1852, while the latest—probably that which gives the book its title—was completed in 1870. It is therefore possible to follow her development as a writer of imaginative prose over a period of eighteen years. Though, as Dante Gabriel said with truth, *Commonplace* is not dangerously exciting to the nervous system, it has its own interest for students of Christina's character. Mr. Mackenzie Bell speaks of Mrs. Gaskell and Mrs. Oliphant in this regard, but the external influence, if any, would seem to have been *Vanity Fair*. We have William Michael's word for it that, though "Thackeray may have appeared to her too wordly and 'knowing' . . . she understood his merits", and her pompous vulgarian, Mr. Durham, is the manifest first cousin of Old Osborne, while the charade scene in *Commonplace* is oddly reminiscent of the famous miming at Gaunt House, even to the participation of a young matron of Hebrew origin whose maiden name is mentioned. The plot is attenuated, yet the three sisters round whom it is spun are not unconvincing, and the trivial, practical details regarding food and raiment suggest a conscious striving after realism. Like most creators of fictitious characters, Christina found it strangely difficult to make a woman "faceetious" without at the same time giving

her either a hard or a peevish air. Among Englishmen this problem has never been more successfully solved than by Shakespeare and Meredith. It was too much for Christina; and even her own sallies have a slightly acid after-taste, as when she writes of a certain Miss Dunn, "who having no proveable great-grandfather was sensitive on the score of pedigree", and scornful of those who could point to none. The justice of her brother's comment may be gauged from the following excerpt:

> If there was a romantic moment in their courtship it was the moment of parting at the noisy, dirty, crowded railway station, when Arthur terrified Lucy, to her great delight, by standing on the carriage step and holding her hand locked fast in his own an instant after the train had started.

There is more energy and more action in "The Lost Titian", where the rich colour and the allusions to the technique of the painter recall the sonnet "In an Artist's Studio". It makes one regret the suppression of the "Folio Q" story, which both Christina's brothers admired, and which she destroyed when her attention was directed to the fact that "it turned out to raise—or to *seem* as if it were meant to raise—some dangerous moral question". Two of the other short stories in the *Commonplace* book, "Nick" and "Hero", are quite good fairy-tales, quite prettily told, but unmarked by any touch of originality or of imaginative impetus. Swinburne, always sweetly appreciative of Miss Rossetti's child-pieces, found peculiar pleasure in the little sketch entitled "Vanna's Twins". The lady, "turned forty-five" and looking "not a day younger", who is stranded at a country station and finds lodgings

with a simple and lovable Italian family is obviously Christina herself. The brief life-story of the twins is sprinkled with tender Italian phrases, and an Italian Christmas carol shines out of it like the golden star over a painted Nativity. The remaining stories of the collection have little of Christina's best to show. In "A Safe Investment" there is an allegorical motive not easy to interpret. A gasworks blows up, there is a run on the bank, a mysterious stranger arrives on a white horse, and in the event the only happy person is a virtuous widow who has invested her money where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor gasworks explode. The scene of "Pros and Cons" is a rectory drawing-room, where a group of unamiable people discuss the question of pew-rents, and one of them, with a queer reminiscence and inversion of the dictum of the Northern Farmer that "the poor in a loomp is bad", observes that the poor "do very well together all in a clump". Finally, in "The Waves of this Troublesome World", we have a background of Sussex cliffs before which mild and well-behaved fisherfolk unfold their artless history.

Many years later Christina Rossetti wrote to Mr. Patchett Martin that *Commonplace* was "out of print and not worth reprinting". Only its inaccessibility to the general reader and its "period" value have seemed to entitle the book to the amount of attention it has received here.

Between the publication of *Commonplace* in 1870 and *Annus Domini* and *Speaking Likenesses* in 1874 there intervened that dolorous period of ill-health which set its mark upon Christina's body and soul for the rest of her earthly life. If—as seems probable—the

two volumes published in 1874 were the work of this period she must have found a double path of escape, the path of fantasy and the path of prayer.

Fantasy is represented by *Speaking Likenesses*, dedicated to Mrs. Rossetti "in grateful remembrance of the stories with which she used to entertain her children". Christina herself described it as "merely a Christmas trifle, would-be in the *Alice* style", and so proved that the assumption of that style was conscious on her part. It was not a fortunate excursion. While she succeeds up to a certain point in reproducing the fantastic externals of Lewis Carroll's stories, she fails—as all his imitators must always fail—to capture anything of their ironic and subtle inner excellence. She cannot be easily inconsequent; she can only be deliberately grotesque. She cannot satirise; she can only carp. And she cannot resist doing what Lewis Carroll would never have done—pointing a moral. The tales themselves are told by a somewhat priggish aunt to a circle of industrious small nieces, who draw ferns, overcast buttonholes, and darn stockings while she relates to them the deeds and dreams of a certain Flora, a disagreeable child who gives a birthday tea-party to a company of children as disagreeable as she. If the pupils of Miss Frances Polidori were of that breed it is small wonder that she welcomed even that hazardous way of release offered by the wooing of Gabriele Rossetti! The heroines of the shorter tales, the little girl whom wood-pigeons, moles, and squirrels help to build a fire for her kettle at a picnic and the orphan grandchild of the village shopkeeper who resists the temptation to nibble the chocolates she is taking through the woods to "the doctor's young ladies",

are less repellent than Flora, but not less prim and virtuous than *Les Petites Filles Modèles* of Madame de Ségur.

Annus Domini contains a prayer for each day in the year, and, except for its illumination of her spiritual being at that tenebrous time, is not of great personal interest. The prayers resemble the collects of the Book of Common Prayer in length and structure, but some of them have a more intimate character and a more passionate urgency of supplication than any collect. *Seek and Find*, published five years later, has a much wider range—the range, indeed, of that Song of the Three Children which fascinated her so much—and aims at something like a philosophic structure. Divided into two parts, Creation (Old Testament) and Redemption (New Testament), it sets out to prove that "the Praise-givers are God's Creatures and Christ's Servants". Dante Gabriel proclaimed the book to be "full of eloquent beauties", but regretted that the scriptural references should be confused with the text, "which they completely smother". Frederic Shields, with whom on the doctrinal side Christina was more in sympathy than she was with her brother, shared this regret, yet where the prose can be isolated from these entanglements it is limpid and graceful, and moves with a fine grave dignity, as, for example, in the passage on mountains:

> Mountains bestow, valleys receive; snowy heights form a water-shed for the low-lying fertility which engarlands their base. Moreover they bestow necessaries not in mere naked sufficiency, but in forms which make hill-streams and water-falls rank among the beauty spots of this beautiful world: such streams descend with murmur, tumult and

thunder, in crystal expanses, in ripples, leaps and eddies, in darkness and light, in clearness and whiteness, in foam and foam-bow.

Though the interval between the publication of *Seek and Find* and *Called to be Saints* was one of two years only, we know from a letter to Dante Gabriel that the second book was written "several years" before. Christina herself was whimsically conscious of the incongruity of the offering when she sent a copy of this study of the minor festivals of the Anglican Church to Swinburne, who acknowledged it with "consummate graciousness" and was "not at all offended". It probably gave him pleasure not only to encounter quotations from Hooker and Fuller in the opening pages but also to find Miss Rossetti's own prose gaining colour and sonority from the example of these divines. The life of each Saint is illustrated by appropriate extracts from the Gospels, by original "biographical additions", by a prayer of Christina's own composition, by parallel columns of texts, by a poem, a gem, and a flower. To the Innocents she assigns chickweed and groundsel, and to St. Pa gorse! The botanical and mineralogical note drawn, as she frankly confesses, "partly from observation of appearances, but mainly fror reading". Many of the interpolated orisons right Jacobean rhythm, and are, inde patched up from King James's Bible.

These rhythms are less audible in *Letter* (1883), where "Notes on the Commandments" forth with a greater flexibility and energy of style she commonly uses in her devotional prose. Some the incidental character-studies have the sharp defini-

tion of Bunyan's figures, as, for example, the contrasted personalities of the Angry Man and the Envious Man, and the sketch of the Sordid Economist (female) who "keenly realises and relishes the distinction between elevenpence-three-farthings and one shilling". Recollections of Layard's *Nineveh*, read long ago at Brighton, seem to have coloured the passage on Babylon, and there is a touch of Sir Thomas Browne's grave eloquence in the description of Egypt's "gods or deified kings, smooth-faced and passionless".

Time Flies: a Reading Diary, appeared in 1885, and is of chequered prose and verse. The prose sections are much concerned with apostles and martyrs, and hagiology in general, but they are traversed by threads of personal and even intimate observation, reminiscence, and commentary. She indulges more in apophthegms than is her wont, as when she says that "A gloomy Christian is like a cloud before the rainbow was vouchsafed", and that "Temptation is Satan's sieve; and a wonderful sieve-maker is Satan". Here, as in *The Face of the Deep*, published seven years later, her style is curiously compact of *naïveté* and sententiousness, solemnity and a sort of demure waggishness, austerity and a touch of Caroline magnificence. Sometimes she builds up her sentences with cumulative deliberation, almost after the manner of Hooker or Donne:

> Faith discerns, embraces; Hope anticipates, aspires; Fear curbs, spurns; Love curbs, spurns, anticipates, aspires, discerns, embraces, cleaves into, unites. Love is the panoply of graces.

At other times she indulges in paradox, and seems to take delight in turning an idea this way and that,

getting everything out of it that patience and ingenuity can extract. Thus, again in *The Face of the Deep*, she writes:

> To descend penitently into the valley of humiliation, to descend obediently and with a good courage into the valley of the shadow of death is to ascend the hill of the Lord.

When these words were written Christina Rossetti's own feet were set upon the tenebrous path. In the same letter which announces to William Michael the despatch of a copy of this, her last, and longest, and most ambitious manual of devotion, to Watts-Dunton she tells her brother that "something brooding" in her health "has reached a point demanding sharp treatment". Three days later, on May 25, 1892, she underwent an operation for cancer of the breast, obediently and—as all her letters at the time bear witness—"with a good courage".

CHAPTER IX

LAST DAYS—THE "NEW POEMS" OF 1896

THE eight years of life which remained to Christina Rossetti after death had taken from her what made it worth the having—the society of her mother—were not years of unmitigated gloom. There were even times, before her fatal illness declared itself, when she was conscious of a heightening of her spirits, and an access of physical well-being. Aunt Charlotte died in 1890, and Aunt Eliza in 1893, but the evanishment of these very ancient and somewhat decrepit ladies did not add much to the sum of her loneliness. She was in touch with a small but devoted circle of friends, Shields, Mrs. Russell Gurney, Miss Lisa Wilson, Watts-Dunton, Mr. (later Prebendary) Nash, and Mackenzie Bell among them. William Michael's affection never failed her, whether he was near her or far away in Italy with his wife. Poor Lucy's health had begun to decline in 1887, and she was almost constantly absent from England from that time till her death at San Remo in April 1894. The nieces and nephews, too, were an unfailing source of interest to Christina, even though she could not think of them, unbaptized and untaught in her faith, as "happy children" in the fullest sense of the phrase. No mis-

givings as to their eternal welfare could, however, deprive her of an aunt's privileges, and these she exercised, gently, half-playfully, perseveringly, until the end.

When William Michael was in Italy he kept up a steady correspondence with his sister in London. Not even the knowledge that in the fundamental matter of religion there was an unbridgeable chasm between his mind and hers could deflect the current of her affection. She insisted on dedicating to him the *Verses* whose devotional character made the dedication slightly incongruous, and, believing that the prayer of a righteous man availeth much, she asked him to pray for her, if he did not "think it wrong", that she might not, after having (in a sense) preached to others, be herself a castaway. This request was made in one of those recurrent moods of self-distrust which grew more frequent as the shadows lengthened and the rhythms of life slowed down; but there were other moods, almost to the last, in which whatever she had had of humorous perception flickered up again. She had always found pleasure in innocuous verbal confusions, such as those of Dogberry and Verges; as early as 1849 she was diverted to hear of the Frenchman's rendering of Sir Humphry Davy's address as "*Sarumfré Dé Vie, Hippocana, Piquet dé lait*"; as late as 1887 she was "much amused" to learn that the young Rossettis' ex-nursery-governess had started a rumour that Miss Rossetti had gone to *La Turquie* when the actual place of her retreat was Torquay. Later still, within two months of her death, she strove to cheer William Michael by reciting her own youthful verses about the Chinaman, and the little jingle "In

my cottage near the Styx" which she had written during her temporary exile at Frome. It was not only her living brother whose image pervaded the quiet chambers of her mind. Dante Gabriel was never forgotten. She rejoiced when the National Portrait Gallery purchased from Aunt Eliza his youthful pencil drawing of his own handsome, un-English-looking head, and when the ever-faithful and enthusiastic Lady Mount-Temple presented *Beata Beatrix* to the nation.

Her output of verse was gradually diminishing; of what she *did* write during these years of self-communion and semi-solitude the greater part was devotional in tone. In 1890 "the staunch Mac" issued a volume entitled simply *Poems by Christina G. Rossetti* which, in addition to the greater part of the 1862, 1866, and 1881 collections contained such notable new items as "Birchington Churchyard", "One Seaside Grave", "A Hope Carol", "There is a budding Morrow in Midnight", and "Exultate Deo". Three years later the S.P.C.K. published, under the unassuming title of *Verses*, a garnering of her lyrics from the various works of hers which had appeared under the auspices of the Society. It cannot be said that the character of her work changes as it draws near the end of her poetical span. She had no earlier and later style, though for a time she had two distinct manners, nor can her poems be divided into well-marked periods as the poems of Tennyson and Swinburne and Browning can. Rather does her art become more intensely her own as the extraneous influences which for a time touched it with borrowed tints are withdrawn one by one. Even these influences had merely played upon the surface of a grave and yet

ardent genius welling up from unplumbed depths within.

The familiar figures have vanished now, the beautiful white-coifed mother, the quaint, feeble aunts, the dark, passionate, sensuous elder brother, the shy, shabby lover with the enigmatic smile. Only William Michael remains, and he, by force of circumstances, is all too often an absentee. And so Christina's own figure becomes gradually isolated, and almost immobilised. Christ Church, Upper Woburn Place, was at the last the very sea-mark of her utmost sail, and there she was wont to sit in the front pew, remaining in her place until the rest of the congregation had dispersed, and shunning all social contacts on her homeward road. It is when we look back on her in these closing years, "dim and grim with dismal ways", as she herself would have said, that we realise the spiritual dignity and splendour of Christina Rossetti. Regarded from this angle that unpicturesque and unimpressive elderly spinster, whose daily life was a round of trivial tasks broken into segments by the appointed hours of meditation and prayer, that shy, serious, frumpishly attired lady, tending her ferns, making scrap-books for sick children, petting her cat, copying her own verse in a fair Italian hand, will suddenly appear invested with the golden majesty of a mediæval Saint, virgin, visionary, martyr.

Though the formidable operation which she underwent in the summer of 1892 was in itself successful and gave her immunity for nine or ten months from one particular type of pain, the interval of relief was not marked by any discernible lightening of mood. It is true that her fortitude never failed. Now, as

in the almost more grievous testing time of 1871–73, she endured physical suffering not, indeed, gaily and gallantly, but with quiet, uncomplaining, gentle courage. She does not allude definitely in her poems of the "before 1893" period to any intimate tribulations, but it is impossible not to see in some of them a reflection of what she then felt and endured, as in these very characteristic lines:

> The hills are tipped with sunshine while I walk
> In shadows dim and cold;
> The unawakened rose sleeps on her stalk
> In a bud's fold,
> Until the sun has flooded all the world with gold.
>
> The hills are crowned with glory, and the glow
> Flows widening down apace:
> Unto the sunny hill-tops I, set low,
> Lift a tired face—
> Ah, happy rose, content to wait for grace!
>
> How tired a face, how tired a brain, how tired
> A heart I lift, who long
> For something never felt but still desired;
> Sunshine and song,
> Song where the choirs of sunny heaven stand choired.

And again in "Go in Peace", and yet again in "Half Dead" and "Take no thought for the Morrow", there is this individual utterance. All the stage-properties of the Pre-Raphaelites have been discarded, all tinselled trappings and tricks of painted phrase. Here is the poet of "Up Hill", of "Remember Me", here is she who is to end the long tale of her songs with "Heaven Over-Arches" and "Sleeping at Last", and here is that heart-haunting beauty with which she alone of her generation could endow the simplest thoughts and the most unlaboured forms.

The trouble in her shoulder and arm returned in the early months of 1893, and this time no operation was possible. She knew that it must be thenceforward simply a question of waiting for the end, and she consistently minimised both the advance and the extent of her sufferings. Introspective though she had always been, and great though the excuse for introspection had become, she had infinite stores of sympathy to release when any call came. Ford Madox Brown's death, the embarrassments of his family, Lucy's last illness, and the perplexities consequent upon her testamentary dispositions, all these drew from her not only deep commiseration but an intense desire to be helpful in an active and practical way. She actually wanted to set off incontinently for Pallanza when the news came of the rapidity with which her sister-in-law's strength was failing, and out of her comparative abundance she was always eager to give with both hands. The poetic impulse, which for fifty years had hardly ever deserted her, flickered and faded nearly a year before her death, but her two last poems may rank with her best, with "Up Hill" and "Parted", "St. John the Apostle" and the sonnets of the *Monna Innominata* sequence.

Lucy's death in the spring of 1894 made it possible for William Michael to return to England and to remain near his sister as the summer and the autumn waxed and waned, and her thread of life wore thin. After the middle of August she was compelled by increasing feebleness to stir abroad no more, and to give up her slow promenades on the arm of her devoted nurse, Harriet Read, in the Square gardens. For the most part she lay in the drawing-room, at first on the sofa

and later on a narrow, uncurtained bed opposite which hung an autotype of Frederic Shield's "Good Shepherd". Uncle John Polidori's dark Byronic features looked out from the wall, and at sunset prismatic reflections quivered on the crystal chandelier which had been a gift from Dante Gabriel to his beloved "Antique". Christina liked to watch the light fading behind the dingy trees, and the metallic throbbing of distant barrel-organs brought no sense of distress to one whose ears had always been sealed to all but heavenly harmonies.

As her pain grew more severe increasing recourse to opiates became necessary, and William Michael attributes partly to their effects the interludes of slight mental confusion and distress which marked the closing phase. Mr. Nash of Christ Church did not fail her in this supreme hour, and his ministrations brought her comfort and appeasement; but there was unfortunately another parson on the scene, the Reverend Charles Gutch of St. Cyprians, who played Newton to Christina Rossetti's Cowper, and, as her brother observes, "took it upon himself to be austere when all the conditions of the case called on him to be soothing and solacing". Even Mr. Gutch's morose theology did not avail to make her "die despairing". What he did was to confirm in her that "imminent sense of unworthiness and apprehension" which the agnostic William Michael perceived to be incompatible with her deep-grained belief in a God Who is Love. There was a strange contrast between the manner in which William Michael's unbelieving wife and his orthodox sister faced the end, for Lucy "showed no sort of flinching nor any enfeeblement of mind".

In Christina Rossetti there had always been a touch of that quaint literalness not infrequently existing in association with poetic genius of a high order. With her it expressed itself in a narrow, anxious interpretation of the exhortations and prohibitions of Holy Scripture. Therefore, mindful of the Commandment "Pray without ceasing", she remained for some days before her death wrapped in silent prayer, only the movement of her lips and the occasional inclination of her head at the name of Jesus revealing how her time was spent: nor did these mute orisons end until within a few minutes of her last quiet sigh in the early morning of December 29, 1894, the morrow of Innocents' Day. The lesson for that morning in the Anglican calendar is taken from the sixty-first chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, and begins:

> The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.
>
> To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn. To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

On January 2, 1895, Mr. Nash conducted the funeral service in Highgate Cemetery. A light film of snow lay on the ground, and gleams of wintry sunshine broke now and then through a grey canopy of cloud, while the song of a robin mingled with the solemn music of the committal sentences. Watts-Dunton, one of the

little group of mourners, remembered both the "winter's woof" of snow and the "robin's warble, sweet yet strong", in the first of the two sonnets which appeared in the *Athenæum* ten days later. That Swinburne's elegy was written before the wreaths had faded on the frozen turf his own words make manifest:

> Scarce yet the days and the starry nights are three
> Since here among us a spirit abode as we,
> Girt round with life that is fettered in bonds of time
> And clasped with darkness about as earth is with the sea.
>
> And now, more high than the vision of souls may climb,
> The soul whose song was as music of stars that chime
> Clothed round with life as of dawn and the mounting sun
> Sings, and we know not here of the song sublime.

Gabriele Rossetti, Frances Rossetti, and Elizabeth Siddal lie in the same grave with Christina. Poor Lizzie's inscription is the only one left ungarlanded by any Biblical text or any fragment of song. For Christina's epitaph the second stanza of "The Lowest Place" has been borrowed, but above it, by a stroke of something like genius, William Michael was inspired to set this line from the *Purgatorio*:

> Volsersi a me con salutevol cenno,

"as suggesting", he explained to Mackenzie Bell "(but not with such a degree of definiteness, as I do not personally believe) the reunion of the other tenants of that grave with Christina in the spiritual world". The "very wide and exceedingly strong outburst of eulogy" which followed her death encouraged her brother, who was also her literary executor, to address himself to the task of selecting for publication the numerous manuscripts of which he found himself in possession. From any attempt to write a formal

biography he abstained, feeling that Christina's life "ought to be written by a Christian", and having received from Mr. Mackenzie Bell an assurance that *he* "met that requirement". All William Michael's energies were concentrated on the *New Poems*. The book appeared in 1896, and contained not only hitherto unprinted pieces, but also certain lyrics from the old Polidori book, others which had appeared in magazines and anthologies but not in any of Christina's own collections, and yet others which had been included in earlier volumes but dropped out of the *Poems* of 1890. *New Poems* were dedicated to Swinburne, a graceful and far from inappropriate action, for he had indeed been "a generous eulogist of Christina Rossetti"; but William Michael went rather far when he wrote that she had "hailed" Swinburne's genius. It would be interesting to know when and how. That she regarded him as "the greatest of living British poets" was probably true enough—but only during the two years that divided Tennyson's death from her own.

In his rather engaging anxiety to gather up the fragments and to lose nothing worth the keeping William Michael admitted both to *New Poems* and to the collected edition of 1904 a certain number of lyrics which his sister's friends would gladly have been without. By pouring forth his bounties "with such a full and unwithdrawing hand" he obscured the outlines of her poetical physiognomy instead of making them more distinct. Yet he might have pleaded in extenuation that she herself included many "second bests" in the volumes arranged by her own hand, for example "Winter Rain", "Bitter for Sweet", and "The Queen of Hearts". There is little in *New*

Poems more disappointing than these. On the other hand there are pearls of great price, lacking which our appreciation of Christina Rossetti must have remained imperfect. How ill could we have spared "The Wind shall lull us yet", "A Soul", "In an Artist's Studio", the second and third of the "Three Stages", "En Route", "An Echo from Willow-wood", any of the Cayley poems, any but the least lovely of the devotional pieces!

For many of Miss Rossetti's devotees in 1896 the sovereign charm of *New Poems* must have lain in the opportunity there given to retrace her course from the beginning, further back than she herself had let it be seen, and so onward to the sad splendour of sunset in "Sleeping at last". This generation can see her steadily and see her whole, and for them there can be no such second revelation; but three or four decades since men were able to evoke in turn the pensive dreamer of 1847, draping the melancholy of youth in crepuscular colours; the disillusioned seeker after love, who wrote:

> I must unlearn the pleasant ways I went;

the observant visitor to Dante Gabriel's studio where Lizzie Siddal's face looked out from all the canvases; the unworldly, introspective woman, finding solace in the gravest of meditations and the gayest of baby jingles; the beloved of Charles Bagot Cayley, dreeing her weird in a strange virginal widowhood; the veiled recluse of the last years, alone with God. They were able to make her "live her very life again, though cold in death".

After the publication of the *Monna Innominata*

sonnets in 1881 Christina Rossetti could hardly say with Félix Arvers:

> Mon âme a son secret, ma vie a son mystère.

She cannot have been unwilling that the world should know of her love, her renunciation, and her sorrow, and she must have realised that a rather large circle of readers would be well able to recognise her lover. She had, however, certain reticences, certain recoils, and she left in manuscript some of the best as well as some of the most outspoken of the poems inspired by the master-passion of her life. Among these is "Cor Mio", or, at least, the octet of "Cor Mio", for the sestet is made to do duty in the eighteenth sonnet of *Later Life*. This octet opens with two lines worthy to rank with any of those miraculous onsets of the *Monna Innominata* series:

> Still sometimes in my secret heart of hearts
> I say "Cor mio" when I remember you.

"To-morrow", "Parted", "Meeting", "Who shall say?" "If I had Words", "By way of Remembrance", all these were stored away with such trifles as "Golden Holly" and "An Alphabet", and all are Cayley's. With regard to her Italian love-poems, also left in manuscript, there may have been a double motive for suppression. Except in the little Polidori book there had been during her lifetime no poem of Christina's published in the language of her fathers, a language she was still using as a medium as late as 1890. She may have doubted whether Italian interpolations would add anything to the attractiveness of volumes intended mainly for English readers; and she may also have felt a faint dubiety as to the quality of her Italian.

Grammatically it is as correct as Swinburne's French; but it sounds no more spontaneous in an Italian ear than does the conscientious English of Rabindranath Tagore in an English one. A literary paper published in Italy was unkind enough, after their emergence in *New Poems*, to characterise Miss Rossetti's Italian verses as "formless and inept". The epithets are misapplied, as well as being over-severe. None of these poems is without structural unity; none is without the impress of passion or of pain. Take, for example, the fifth of the *Rosseggiar dell' Oriente* cycle:

Dolce cor mio, perduto e non perduto,
Dolce mia vita che mi lasci in morte,
Amico e più che amico, ti saluto.
Ricordati di me; chè cieche e corte
Fur le speranze mie, ma furon tue:
Non disprezzar questa mia dura sorte.
Lascia ch' io dica "Le speranze sue
Come le mie languiro in questo inverno"—
Pur me rassegnerò, quel che fue fue.
Lascia ch' io dica ancor, "Con lui discerno
Giorno che spunta da gelata sera,
Lungo cielo al di là di breve inferno,
Al di là dell' inverno primavera."

(Heart of my heart, lost yet not lost to me,
My life, who going leavest me in death,
Friend and much more than friend, I call to thee.
Hold me in thy remembrance. But a breath
My hopes might here endure, yet they were thine.
Scorn not this hard decree that gainsayeth;
Let me but say of thee, "His hopes like mine
Withered away beneath this winter cold."
The past is spent; myself I must resign;
Yet let me say, "Like him I do behold
Dawnlight beyond chill twilight glimmering,
Far-stretching heaven past narrow hell unrolled,
And far beyond the bourne of winter—Spring.")

Christina may have felt that by using another

language than English in these poems she was interposing between her face and the eyes of the world the same sort of mask which the image of the Provençal lady had provided in *Monna Innominata*. But it certainly gave her pleasure to dabble sometimes in the *lingua toscana*, as she proved when she set herself to translate some parts of *Sing-Song*. In Italian the tenderness of the graver lyrics is enhanced by the diminutives sprinkled in almost every line, and the lightness of the lighter ones loses nothing in the transition. Occasionally an almost literal word-for-word rendering has been achieved, as in the delicate daisy quatrain quoted in Chapter V.:

Spunta la margherita
  Qual astro in sullo stelo,
E l' erbetta infiorita
  Rassembra un verde cielo.

Among the more intimate poems in the posthumous collection are the eleven charming Valentines inspired by Mrs. Rossetti's chance remark that she had never received one. "I, her C. G. R.," said a pencilled note in Christina's hand, "ever after supplied one on the day; and (so far as I recollect) it was a surprise every time, she having forgotten all about it in the interim." It is a little curious that nowhere in her published poems, with the noble exception of the dedicatory sonnet to the *Pageant* volume, should Frances Rossetti's adoring youngest child have given any lyric utterance to the love that bound them together, or to the "love-lore that is not troublesome". After Cayley's death that bond was the strongest holding her to any mortal being; it was probably at all times stronger than her transient *engoûment* for Collinson;

and when her second love-affair "went agley", it was, with her religion, the only solace left to her beneath the sun. Yet neither in the self-revelatory sonnet sequences nor in her personal lyrics can any definite allusion to her mother be discerned. All that one *can* discern is a darkening and deepening of the current of feeling after Mrs. Rossetti's death.

Some of the fruits of the Rossetti craze for *bouts-rimés* are harvested in *New Poems*, and among these early exercises of the youngest experimenter a few are surprisingly vigorous, while others—perhaps with floating memories of Maturin about them—are queerly hectic and extreme. The first nine of a set of twelve were done at Brighton in 1848, and the sensitive reader will perceive the lingering influence of environment in the sonnet written after Christina's return to London, with its images of the "miserable hack drawing a cab from left to right", the "weary donkey", and the "showman of a sight". There are faint touches of humour and vague gropings after realism in some of these early diversions, but Miss Rossetti was seldom either humorous or realistic. The delightfulness of "An Alphabet", with its "elegant, eloquent Earl" and its "wonderful wax-work so gay", may have been quite as unintentional as the delightfulness of *Struwwelpeter*.

Nearly a fourth part of *New Poems* is occupied by devotional verse covering the whole span of Christina Rossetti's creative life, beginning in 1847 with "I do set my bow in the cloud" and ending "*circa* 1893" with "Heaven Over-Arches". Between these two points lies that accumulation of poems, short and long, good and somewhat less than good, which went to swell the overwhelming sum total in the 1904 edition. Here

are "Moonshine", the exquisite carol "For my God-children", the sonnet on Newman, "Not Yours but You", "There remaineth therefore a rest", "Birds of Paradise", and one or two others so good of their kind that it seems strange they should have been left in the obscurity of manuscript or dispersed in periodicals and anthologies. And lastly there is "Heaven Over-Arches", a better poem even than "Sleeping at last", because it is quieter, steadier, a thing lovely in itself, needing no purple of thyme or clover to heighten its loveliness. There is an interesting echo of the second stanza in an unpublished letter from Miss Rossetti to Sir Wyndham Dunstan, written in May 1894, where she says, "Let us look up to heaven full of mansions rather than down to earth full of graves".

Heaven overarches earth and sea,
  Earth sadness and sea-bitterness.
Heaven overarches you and me:
A little while and we shall be—
Please God—where there is no more sea,
  Nor barren wilderness.

Heaven overarches you and me,
  And all earth's gardens and her graves.
Look up with me until we see
The day break and the shadows flee.
What though to-night wrecks you and me
  If so to-morrow saves?

CHAPTER X

EPILOGUE

"SIR," said Dr. Johnson, "a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

With some qualifications the attitude of men towards the versifying of women has been very much like that of the Doctor towards their preaching. In individual cases justice and discrimination have deterred them from any stubborn protests that the thing was "not done well". Yet did not the profane Pausanias suggest that it was the beauty of Corinna's body quite as much as the excellence of her poems which induced the judges to award the prize to her over Pindar's disconcerted head? It is certain that until far into the eighteenth century surprise continued to be felt when a woman wrote verse, and if the verse happened to be passably good the surprise was proportionately great. One feels this with Christine de Pisan, with the Matchless Orinda, with Mrs. Aphra Behn. All these ladies found warm admirers among their masculine contemporaries; but there was always a sense that their works would have been rather less cordially received if they had been the works of a brother-man. There was always the slight tilt of the head, the gentle wag

of the chin, as the male critic appraised the outpourings of the poetess. Not in the very first rank, perhaps; but then——! And with excellent sportsmanship he proceeded to put together a pretty bouquet for the Aphra or the Orinda of the day. He could afford to be generous: he can afford to be generous still. No woman poet of towering genius has yet arisen to make it hard for him.

Into the causes it would be vain and unprofitable to attempt to enter here. "Since this effect defective comes by cause", it may be some congenital and inherent disability that has brought one woman after another to a halt upon the lower paths of Helicon; or it may be the cumulative handicap imposed on successive generations by the absence of cultivation, the dearth of opportunity, the general acceptance of the Miltonic proposition that "one tongue is enough for a woman". This handicap could not be lightened, much less lifted, either by the widened ideals of the Renaissance or the yet wider ideals of our own age. By an unborn generation it may at some distant date be thrown off or outrun. Whatever the cause, the fact remains, and it is no act of grace to any woman-poet, alive or dead, to belittle or to ignore it.

The second half of the eighteenth century brought forth so plentiful a crop of ladies who wrote verse that men ceased to be "surprised to find it done at all". But the level of achievement was low; so low that such "second bests" as Mrs. Barbauld's "Life" and Fanny Greville's "Prayer for Indifference" stick fiery off indeed. Isobel Pagan, Lady Anne Lindsay, and the Baroness Nairne were showing about the same time with what tenderness, humour, and charm women could

write homely songs in the Scots vernacular, but this medium, so well suited to their genius, did not bring them into competition with the "Big-Bow Wows"; and as the century moved on its majestic way women-poets multiplied in England. Odd corners of the *Lady's Magazine* were pranked with lyrics composed by Ladies of Quality; Countess Temple was elected Oberon's Laureate by Horace Walpole; Lady Nuneham wrote songs—and hid them diffidently away; Hannah More, like her friend Garrick, gave a hand each way to Comedy and Tragedy; Joanna Baillie tore *The Passions* to tatters; Miss H. Falconar indited a poem on slavery in heroic couplets; Miss Williams and Mrs. Smith warbled sonnets to the moon.

The next generation swelled the ranks of petticoated songsters. Mrs. Hemans, L. E. L., Jean Ingelow, Adelaide Procter, plaintive, pleasing, and prolific, they emerge one by one from the serried shadows, ladies who wrote verse as they embroidered pole-screens, deftly, perseveringly, choosing the neatest patterns and the most vivid hues; and one by one they recede and fade into the background. Presently there remains only the tenuous, dark-tressed figure of Mrs. Browning, of whom an illustrious critic said with truth that "she was a great poetess and almost a great poet". At first she is companionless, for the proud and tragic spectre of Emily Brontë holds itself aloof; but after a little time she is joined by a sister-singer of whom it would not be too much to say that she was often a great poetess and sometimes a great poet. It is inevitable that for a moment we should look at them side by side, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Georgina Rossetti.

During her lifetime, and for twenty or thirty years

after her death, Mrs. Browning was generally accepted as the chief of the Victorian women poets, aloft and alone upon her pedestal, "unapproachable by any woman who has ever touched lyre or blown through reed since the days of the great Æolian poetess". Quite apart from the glamour of her romantic marriage and the accession of renown which was hers as Browning's reputation grew, she had many paths of approach to the heart and the intellect of mid-Victorian England. Her own heart was so throbbingly responsive to love and pity, her own intellect so crowded with enthusiasms, her range of creative energy was so wide, her sympathies, whether political or humanitarian, found such sweet and penetrating utterance, that it would have been strange indeed had she not been appreciated in an age with which she had so much in common. If it was the age of Tennyson, Mazzini, and Lord Shaftesbury, it was also the age of stove-pipe hats, wax fruits, and the Great Exhibitions of 1851 and 1862.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's imagination was like an impetuous flood, constantly breaking through dykes and dams, and so spreading itself into a chain of vast lagoons, shallow and luminous, taking colour from the sky. And here lies the strongest contrast between her and Christina Rossetti, whose mind, having no such foaming onsets, no such tranquil expansions, carved out for itself a deep though narrow channel and thrust its way, ever darkening, towards the unseen sea.

In the matter of sincerity there is nothing to choose between these two true-hearted and single-minded ladies; in the matter of mental equipment Mrs. Browning was perhaps the more fortunate, though too much has been made of Miss Rossetti's lack of

mere "book-learning"; in the matter of inspiration, it can hardly be said that Apollo laid his shining hand more lightly or more seldom upon one head than upon the other. Why, then, should modern critical estimation endorse that judgement of Swinburne disputed forty years ago by Oscar Wilde, and assign to Christina a slightly higher place?

The answer may be that it is because her best is better than Mrs. Browning's best. They both wrote too much, and preserved too much of what they had written; and if the sum total of their poetry were weighed in the balance it might be found that the elder lady's general level of attainment was at least as high as the younger lady's, and that she achieved a rather more even distribution of ore and dross. But if we make a small bouquet of Christina Rossetti's most beautiful songs and sonnets we shall be constrained to acknowledge that within her own limits no woman-poet of the modern world can be found to equal her, and not an overwhelming number of men:

βαιὰ μέν, ἀλλὰ ῥόδα.

"The Cry of the Children" and "Cowper's Grave" may be read and remembered as long as "When I am dead, my dearest" and "Up Hill"—but not for the same reasons or with the same measure of delight.

Like her lack of bookishness, the extent and degree of Christina Rossetti's association with the Pre-Raphaelite movement has sometimes been exaggerated. She was, of course, in touch with the movement from the first, and neither its principles nor their implications were unacceptable to her. But it may be doubted whether the form and colour of her most characteristic

poems would have been very different from what they are had no such fraternity as the P.R.B. ever existed. It is true that she walked in step with the Pre-Raphaelites; yet she did not walk among them. It is a little difficult to determine whether it was she who helped the movement onward, or the movement that helped her. The words of Swinburne and Gosse already quoted certainly suggest that she was regarded as a potent ally, and that in her voice many men heard the authentic trump that laid the walls of the Philistine stronghold low. But the poems that are most intimately hers are the least Pre-Raphaelite in complexion. "Goblin Market" is, of course, essentially Romantic. It could not possibly have been written in the England of Queen Anne or of the earlier Georges. But it can hardly be called Pre-Raphaelite except in so far as that movement was a repercussion of the Romantic Revival. By catching and holding the attention of the enlightened public in 1862, Miss Rossetti may have made the way easier for the acceptance of those ideals with which her brother and his friends were associated; but when their turn came the debt was in some measure repaid, for the world which had been taught to admire Morris wall-papers and Burne-Jones windows was quite ready to enjoy "The Prince's Progress".

When, towards 1847-48, the young Christina began to find herself poetically, she was not slow to demonstrate that there was alive within her a definite personality, groping for expression in forms that were borrowed or copied from no single exemplar. She had, as has been said, no earlier and later style. But it is none the less possible to divide her poems into two main groups: those in which she writes under Pre-Raphaelite influ-

ences and those in which she does not. Naturally insensitive to music, she had an almost miraculous perception of the harmonies inherent in words. Sound served her better than colour at her greatest need. In the finest of her lyrics colour is used with a chary hand; it is in her narratives and ballads that she splashes it on without restraint. How excellently the two manners might be combined she showed when she wrote "A Birthday", but it is in her long poems that the Pre-Raphaelite touch is most clearly discernible. As time passed, the essential quality of her genius underwent little change; indeed, it had been stabilised before she was thirty. Yet after Dante Gabriel's death she seemed gradually to lose interest in the ballad form, and her poems tended to contract, to become more and more subjective, less and less pictorial. And so, for lack of any appropriate setting, the broken betrothal *motif*, after haunting her verse for three long decades, fades out at last, and she is left alone with her two sovereign sources of inspiration—her heart, which was with Cayley; her mind, which was with God.

Before Dante Gabriel's death, when Pre-Raphaelite forces were still at work and her intellect was constantly stimulated from without by sumptuous and pitiful phantasms, Christina had been tempted sometimes to project herself into the body of an imaginary person and speak through borrowed lips. It is interesting and a little curious to observe how often this poetical avatar is a woman haunted by memories not only of an unhappy but of a guilty love. "Sœur Louise de la Miséricorde" is the younger sister of "Eva" in the Polidori book; "Cousin Kate" and "Sister Maude"

are of one flesh and blood; the tortured suppliant of "The Convent Threshold" bears the same face under the same coif as does the first of "The Three Nuns". Except when she is writing of her own passion for Cayley, a passion fundamentally ascetic and spiritual, Christina Rossetti seldom achieves such quivering and clanging rhythms, such fiercely visualised images, as she does in "The Convent Threshold", written when she was twenty-eight, when Collinson had faded out of her life and Cayley had scarcely made his presence felt. The eighth stanza of this perturbing and magnificent poem prolongs its echoes in the eighth and ninth verses of "The Poor Ghost" five years later. It is wrought of the same lurid-coloured threads, but with much greater strength of texture and intricacy of design:

> I tell you what I dreamed last night.
> It was not dark, it was not light,
> Cold dews had drenched my plenteous hair
> Through clay; you came to seek me there,
> And "Do you dream of me?" you said.
> My heart was dust that used to leap
> To you; I answered half asleep:
> "My pillow is damp, my sheets are red,
> There's a leaden tester to my bed:
> Find you a warmer playfellow,
> A warmer pillow for your head,
> A kinder love to love than mine."
> You wrung your hands while I, like lead,
> Crushed downwards through the sodden earth:
> You smote your hands, but not in mirth,
> And reeled, but were not drunk with wine.

About the time that this was written it seems as if Christina must surely have read "Clerk Saunders", re-reading it before she wrote "The Poor Ghost". Yet such hypotheses are perilous. Her mind moved

often not only to music that she had forgotten, but to music she had never even heard.

If we consider the extent of Dante Gabriel's influence upon his sister and the depth of her admiration for him it may seem strange that he should make such fugitive and infrequent appearances in her verse. He is, of course, the artist from whose canvases the one haunting face looks forth; his is the portrait with "dark eyes and features from the South" in the brief posthumous fragment of which he himself excised the middle stanza; he is referred to by name in the two P.R.B. jingles written at Frome in 1853; but all else is hazard and conjecture until "Birchington Churchyard". Unlike George Eliot, Christina wrote no "Brother and Sister" sonnets, recording the happy companionship of a small boy and a yet smaller girl in the days of their youth. That Dante Gabriel proved a more disquieting sort of elder brother than the excellent Mr. Isaac Evans need not have disqualified him; rather the contrary—if his sister had not been so strait a Puritan. As far as we know, she addressed to him neither song nor sonnet, admonishment nor salutation, thus denying to him what was freely given to William Bell Scott and "Holly" Stephens, Lisa Wilson, Mrs. David Masson, and Henrietta Polydore. His place in her poetry is not definite or demarcated. He pervades the Pre-Raphaelite poems but at no time does he dominate them. There could be no greater error than to imagine that in these poems Christina is playing the sedulous ape to her brother. They could not well have been written without him, but he counts for nothing in the genesis of her most characteristic songs. She was always herself; but there were moments

when, like her own Maggie, she was "all crimson and gold from top to toe". These were borrowed pomps, from which her dark face looked forth with incongruous gravity, and at the last she discarded them in favour of those grey weeds which she had long loved to wear.

To the Pre-Raphaelite category we may assign "The Prince's Progress", "A Peal of Bells", "A Royal Princess", "A Ballad of Boding", "Amor Mundi", "From House to Home", "An Old World Thicket", "An Echo from Willow Wood", "In an Artist's Studio", "The World", "Eve", "Cannot Sweeten", "Noble Sisters", "Cousin Kate", "The Ghost's Petition", "Sister Maude", "Love from the North", "Maggie a Lady", "Dream Love", "A Soul", "Autumn", "The Convent Threshold", "Three Nuns", "Sunset to Star Rise", "An 'Immurata' Sister", "Birds of Paradise", "Maude Clare", "A Triad", "Light Love", "The Hour and the Ghost", "Gone Before", "Brandons Both", "Acme", "A Chilly Night", "An Apple Gathering", "An End", "A Bird's Eye View", many of the more colourful carols and canticles, such as "Gold-haired, lily-white", "Crimson as the rubies, crimson as the roses", and some poems, "Goblin Market" and "A Birthday" among them, which are poised between her two manners with a slight inclination to the Pre-Raphaelite side. In this group are several which Miss Rossetti dropped out of her later editions, and several which she left in manuscript; and with them might be ranged a disconcertingly large number of lesser things that hardly merit classification. All these have certain features in common; the vividness, almost the violence, of their colour-values, their

high, almost febrile, emotional tension; their artificiality, which seldom lapses into affectation yet is far removed from the unpremeditated grace of her finest lyrics.

To the second category, where Pre-Raphaelite influences are faint and sparse, belong all the Cayley poems, including *Monna Innominata*, most of the *Later Life* sonnets, "Remember Me", "Twice", "What would I give", "If I had words", "When I am dead, my Dearest", "Up Hill", "The wind shall lull us yet", "Somewhere or Other", the two poems inspired by her Italian journey, the two inspired by the Franco-Prussian War, "St. John the Apostle", "Grant us such grace", "Sleep at Sea", "Wife to Husband", "Mirage", "Memory", "The Round Tower at Jhansi", "Birchington Churchyard", "One Seaside Grave", "Mirrors of Life and Death", the Valentines to Mrs. Rossetti, "Twilight Night", and most of the lyrics, devotional and otherwise, of her last five years.

As an example in each kind we may take, first, "In an Artist's Studio" and second, "Parted".

IN AN ARTIST'S STUDIO

One face looks out from all his canvases,
  One self-same figure sits or walks or leans;
  We found her hidden just behind those screens,
  That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
  A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
  A saint, an angel—every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
  And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
  Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
Not as she is but was when hope shone bright;
  Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

This sonnet is itself one of the canvases from which Lizzie Siddal's cryptic face looks out for ever. The influence of Dante Gabriel is strong in every line, yet there is none which we feel that he might have written. The orthodoxy of the Petrarchan form is balanced by the heterodoxy of the rhymes—"canvases" and "loveliness", "dim" and "dream". One feels that the same forces which evoked and fashioned *The House of Life* were already at work in 1856, and that Christina Rossetti as well as her brother was reacting to them. If against this voluptuous and enigmatic sonnet we set the sad little song written "*circa* 1880", with its hushed, irregular rhythm, its sighing pauses, and its movement as of two hands first stretched out in appeal and then locked in despair, we shall see how far Christina Rossetti travelled from the Pre-Raphaelite conventions when she followed her heart:

PARTED

Had Fortune parted us,
  Fortune is blind;
Had Anger parted us,
  Anger unkind—
But since God parts us
  Let us part humbly,
Bearing our burden
  Bravely and dumbly.

And since there is but one
  Heaven, not another,
Let us not close that door
  Against each other.
God's Love is higher than mine,
  Christ's tenfold proved,
Yet even I would die
  For thee, Beloved.

"Goblin Market" by its nature is bound to stand alone. And despite the sustained magnificence of the

imagery in "The Prince's Progress" few of Christina Rossetti's admirers will deplore the non-existence of any other poem of the same length from her hand. Her genius was in its very essence lyrical. Her voice was as full of beautiful notes as were the voices of those Italian nightingales whose song she heard in the woods at Como. When she writes such lines as "Remember me when I am gone away", or "Rome has passed with her awful voice", or "In sullen silence of exceeding pain", their rhythm seems to be obedient to some natural law, "as music of stars that chime".

There was nothing either subtle or complex in her modes of thought and of self-revelation. "*Elle n'était pas une philosophe*", says Madame Félix-Faure Goyau, "*ni une logicienne, mais une âme chantante et souffrante.*" Her theory of life, if she had had one, might have been summed up in that line of Dante's which she chose as the text for the thirteenth *Monna Innominata* sonnet:

E drizzeremo gli occhi al Primo Amore.

Abstract ideation, though quite within her scope, did not satisfy her instincts. She seems to have thought, as she wrote, chiefly in images. Thus in the opening lines of her poem on St. John the Apostle one idea breaks itself into three gorgeous affirmations:

> Earth cannot bar flame from ascending,
> Hell cannot bind light from descending,
> Death cannot finish life never-ending.

She had no theories about the technique of her divine craft. "Disquisitions on metre are somewhat my antipathy", she wrote to Sir Wyndham Dunstan,

adding with a touch of half-humorous diffidence, "*allusion* self-evident!" She does not seem to have paused often, or to have cared to polish and re-word, though William Michael speaks of her making occasional alterations "with a view to right and fine details of execution when needful". But her heterodoxy is never anarchy, and at no time would she have felt any sympathy with poetic cranks or freaks.

Few poets have ever been born with a more curiously cumulative poetical heredity than was Christina Rossetti. On both her father's and her mother's side the tendency to versify was constantly cropping up in the half-century that preceded her birth. Frances Rossetti herself wrote trite and pretty verses, and she can have felt small surprise when her elder son and younger daughter began at a tender age to express themselves in rhyme. Artistically Christina's early environment could hardly have been worse; intellectually it could hardly have been better. Even William Michael was good at *bouts rimés*, and Maria Francesca, though her personal bent lay towards prose, was a lover and an interpreter of great poetry all her days. Yet there was always a Christina who eluded them all, "and was indeed alone".

Milton, for whom she cared so little, would have found in her best work the sensuous and simple quality which he demanded of poetry. One result of this twofold virtue is the "rememberableness" of her lyrics. They will hang in the mind, fresh and flexible, long after more pretentious garlands have turned brittle and grey. For this and for other reasons Christina Rossetti is a man's poet. Startling though the proposition may sound, it can be made good out of the mouths of many

men. That she should attract most women who love pure poetry and all pious Anglicans of both sexes is natural; but lay critics of vigorous tastes, intolerant of anything touched with mawkishness, morbidity, or gush, find delight in her, find rest, refreshment, and heart's ease. Her melancholy does not sadden them, her ardours do not weary, nor does her austerity repel.

Attempts to tear the heart out of her mystery are apt to end in failure. It is easier to see what she has done than to say how she did it. The essential magic of her style eludes analysis, as such magic always will. But at her highest pitch she instinctively uses certain recognisable cadences, certain recurrent images, using them every time in a slightly different way. One of the most interesting things about her shorter poems is their curve. This most commonly takes the form of an arc, rising in the centre and dropping again to its first level at the end. Sometimes the curve goes up without any corresponding dip, sometimes the ascent is like that of a rocket which breaks into stars at its extreme point. The upward movement may have the eager beat of a bird's wings or the slow plod of climbing feet; the descent may be as swift as the earthward swoop of a skylark, or as gradual as the *vol plané* of a heron.

Despite her excursions into Pre-Raphaelite domains Christina Rossetti was not an imitator; nor, although she evolved from her instincts and experiences a style inalienably hers, can she be called an innovator. She left no successors, she founded no school. If in a sort of grave and eloquent simplicity Mrs. Meynell and some other women poets of the generation that followed seem to draw near her at times, it is, one feels, an

unconscious affinity, akin to that which united her to the Caroline mystics. It is all the more curious that her poetry should have moved so quietly to its place in English literature, a place from which it can hardly be deposed now. Her fame has suffered no fluctuations. Æstheticism did not bring it forward; Neo-Georgianism has not driven it back. She has weathered the storm of literary Bolshevism which broke after the Great War, and it is difficult to conceive what consequence yet hanging in the stars could throw her into complete eclipse. This third decade of the twentieth century finds her reputation still growing. Her candour, her emotional depth, her felicity of phrase, and intensity of vision are strangely congenial to an age which has moved so far away both from her moral code and from her religious creed.

Until a comparatively recent date Christina Rossetti does not appear to have been very well known or very enthusiastically regarded outside England and the United States. But during the years preceding the centenary of her birth she has received her meed of praise from other lands, and to the laurels and lilies of MM. Legouis and Cazamian and Madame Félix-Faure Goyau has been added the marigold wreath woven by Mr. N. K. Venkatesam, of Government College, Kubaconam, Madras. Madame Félix-Faure Goyau says appreciatively of some of Christina's poems that they are *narrants et délicieux comme les beaux lécythes funéraires de l'Attique*, and the tribute is as just as it is graceful; Legouis and Cazamian, while laying down the irrefutable proposition that her work *ne sera pas entièrement durable*, add this saving clause: *Mais les plus fraîches fleurs y abondent; discrètes, d'un arome*

délicat, et qui du premier coup imprègnent le souvenir. Her first appeal, however, must always be to the English-speaking peoples; that *arome délicat* cannot be embalmed in any other tongue.

The Pre-Raphaelite part of Christina Rossetti's verse, like the verse of Dante Gabriel, of William Morris, and, with certain exceptions, of Swinburne, is as essentially Victorian as a Baxter print or a Tenniel cartoon. To say this is to belittle none of these things. "Victorian" will soon cease to be a term of reproach. But when we turn to the great lyrics of the second group we find in them that timeless quality inherent in the purest poetry; and we realise that no influences, no factors, no impressions outside the frontiers of her own inviolate soul could have given to those lyrics their penetrating eloquence, their perdurable music, their austere loveliness.

APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Biography.	*Principal Publications.*
Born, December 5, 1830.	
1842. Earliest known verse, *To My Mother on her Birthday*.	
	1847. Privately printed collection of early poems from press of grandfather Polidori.
	1848. *The Last Hope* (afterwards called *Heart's Chill Between*) published in *The Athenæum* of October 14. *Death's Chill Between* appears there a week later.
1849. Formation of the P.R.B. Christina becomes engaged to James Collinson. Painted by D. G. Rossetti in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*.	
1850. Engagement broken off. Sits to D. G. Rossetti for the head in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*.	1850. Seven poems in *The Germ*.
1851–52. Assists in Mrs. Rossetti's day-school. Visits Longleat.	
1852. Coaches the daughters of Mr. Swynfen Jervis.	
1853. Goes to Frome with father and mother.	

Biography.	*Principal Publications.*
1854. Family reunited in London. Death of Gabriele Rossetti. Christina sits to Hunt for the composite head in *The Light of the World*. Desires to join Aunt Eliza Polidori at Scutari.	
1859. Writes *Goblin Market*.	1857–63. Contributions to *The Imperial Dictionary of Biography*. Allingham reprints *An End* in *Nightingale Valley*.
1860. Deepening friendship with C. B. Cayley. Becomes an associate sister of the Highgate House of Charity. D. G. Rossetti marries Lizzie Siddal.	
1861. Visits Paris, Rouen, Coutances, and Jersey with Mrs. Rossetti and William Michael.	1861. *Up Hill*, *A Birthday*, and *An Apple Gathering* published in *Macmillan's Magazine*.
1862. Acute anxiety concerning D. G. Rossetti's health after his wife's death.	1862. *Goblin Market and other Poems*.
1864. Photographed by Lewis Carroll at Cheyne Walk.	
1865. Visits Como, Pavia, Brescia, Verona, Milan, Lucerne, Bâle, Bergamo, etc., with Mrs. Rossetti and William Michael.	
1866. Seven weeks' visit to Penkill Castle, Ayrshire. Refuses offer of marriage from Charles Bagot Cayley.	1866. *The Prince's Progress and other Poems*.
1867. Removes with Mrs. Rossetti and William Michael from Albany Street to 5 Endsleigh Gardens (Euston Square).	

Biography.	*Principal Publications.*
1868. Mr. Gladstone is heard to repeat the *Maiden Song* by heart.	
1870. Meets Edmund Gosse.	1870. *Commonplace and other Short Stories.*
1871. Exophthalmic bronchocele or Graves' disease declares itself.	
1872. Second and more severe breakdown of D. G. Rossetti.	1872. *Sing-Song.*
1873. Symptoms of Graves' disease abate. Visit to Kelmscott. First meeting with Watts-Dunton.	
1874. William Michael marries Lucy Madox Brown.	1874. *Annus Domini.* *Speaking Likenesses.*
1876. Christina Rossetti and her mother move into 30 Torrington Square.	1875. First collected general edition of poems.
1877. Visit to D. G. Rossetti at Herne Bay. Drawn by him in coloured crayons with Mrs. Rossetti. Refuses request of Augusta Webster that she should support the movement in favour of Woman's Rights.	1879. *Seek and Find.* 1881. *A Pageant and other Poems.* *Called to be Saints.*
1882. Death of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.	1882. Contributions to *Sonnets of Three Centuries*, edited by Hall Caine.
1883. Dedication to Christina of Swinburne's *Century of Roundels.* Death of Charles Bagot Cayley.	1883. *Letter and Spirit.*
1886. Death of Mrs. Rossetti. Meeting with Katherine Tynan Hinkson.	1885. *Time Flies.*

Biography.

1891. Cancer develops.
1892. Undergoes operation.
Abortive suggestion that G. F. Watts should paint her portrait.
Her name is mentioned as a possible successor to Tennyson as Laureate.
1893. Return of cancer.
1894. December 29. Death of Christina Rossetti at 30 Torrington Square.

Principal Publications.

1890. Re-issue of poems in Collected Edition.

1892. *The Face of the Deep.*

1893. *Verses* (S.P.C.K.).

Posthumous Books.

1896. *New Poems*, edited by William Michael Rossetti.
1897. *Maude.*

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